

IMPRESSIONS

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**ANGOC**

**ASIAN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS COALITION  
FOR  
AGRARIAN REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Manila, Philippines

The Asian Non-Governmental Organisations Coalition for  
Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) presents  
this ANGOC Award for Rural Development

to the

**ASSOCIATION FOR SARVA SEVA FARMS  
(ASSEFA)**

in recognition of ASSEFA's outstanding work in the field of  
rural development particularly with respect to their work  
with the rural poor groups and small farmers in India.

Given this 22nd day of May, 1986.

DR. DIOSCORO L. UMAL I  
Chairman, ANGOC

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# IMPRESSIONS

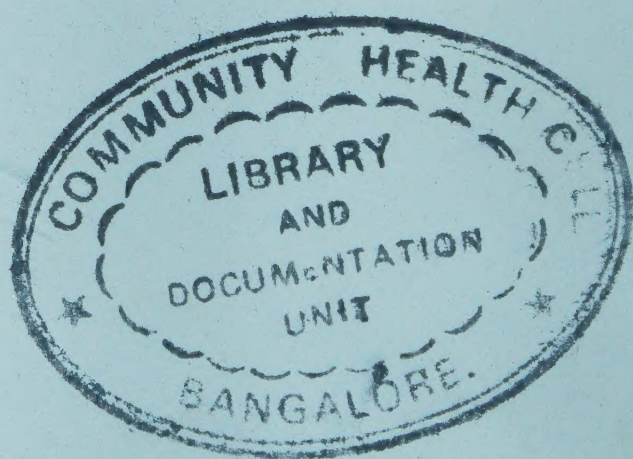


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(ASSEFA)

SECOND EDITION - 1987

COLLECTION OF ARTICLES ON ASSEFA

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# FOREWORD

This publication titled "Impressions" is a collection of articles and reports written by persons, who came in touch with ASSEFA in their search for an understanding of a Rural Development model which works. The authors being drawn from such diverse disciplines as Planning, Aid Administration, Research, Education etc., their perspectives of ASSEFA achievements or failures have relevance not only for ASSEFA but also for others who are upto the same task.

For ASSEFA, it is a reflection of its track record as seen by persons with experience, who travel widely, study and research on similar ventures all over, and it is believed, objectivity is the essence in their observations when such reports are made. Some of the questions raised in these reports are important to ASSEFA and are also questions for others, especially the questions on potential of replicability or extensibility of the model. Another issue is of self-reliance or non-dependence of rural communities or service organisations on external sources of assistance whether they are of financial, technological or other nature. In a technologically progressive world of today, interdependence is unavoidable. ASSEFA believes that the poor millions of India have something tangible to contribute for world peace and prosperity. In this, the rich and the poor have both to share—poor, their problems and struggles and the rich, their resources and knowhow. ASSEFA's endeavour is to create an universal solidarity between the haves and the havenots, offering in the process an opportunity for learning and understanding through acts of justice and sharing.

This Forum appeared in the form of a National Convention, which was held at Madurai during the period 11-16 December 1985. This publication was first brought out to mark this occasion.

This is the Second edition of "Impressions," a collection of articles on ASSEFA and we believe this would offer us wide opportunity for mutual sharing.

Madras

July 15, 1987

S. Loganathan  
Executive Director

# The Bhoodan Movement : A legacy of Vinoba Bhave in Contemporary India\*

One hardly hears about such movements as *Bhoodan* (Land-gift). And yet, for the Gandhians of India, this movement has an alternate solution to many of the world's economic, social, and political problems. Until my recent visit to India, I had resolved, like many others, that Bhoodan was either dead or stagnating. On the contrary, the leaders of the movement are filled with new enthusiasm and hope for its success. There are problems and setbacks for sure, but an attempt is being made to resolve them with patience, perseverance, and courage. Within the last ten years, it has achieved some concrete results which were not experienced in twenty years, since its beginning in 1951. Under the leadership of many *Loka Sevaks* (servants of the people), many of whom will be considered excellent social workers, Bhoodan has changed in scope, emphasis, and meaning. Nevertheless, its ideology has remained Gandhian. Its primary aim is to help the "have-nots" of society, who have suffered under poverty, modernisation, and caste prejudices. Consequently, much attention is being given to the *Harijans* (people of the lord), who for centuries have borne the stigma of untouchability. Although presently the work of redistributing the land obtained in Bhoodan is concentrated in the state of *Tamil Nadu* in South India, it has achieved a modest success also in Bihar and Maharashtra. Since Bhoodan Land lies undeveloped all over India, the task ahead is enormous but most promising.

When one thinks of Bhoodan, one inevitably ponders on the life and work of Acharya Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982). Widely recognized as a saint who stepped into the sandals of Gandhi after his death, he is venerated at home and respected abroad, for fourteen long years he tracked the dusty roads of India on foot, asking landowners to donate him a piece of land for the poor of India. His dream was to collect 50 million acres of land. He collected 4 million acres.<sup>1</sup> His goal was to achieve *Gram Swaraj* (village independence of self-sufficiency) for Indian villages, a goal set forward by Mahatama Gandhi. His pledge, taken on April 15, 1957, at Kanyakumari was ".....as long as Gram Swaraj is not established in India, I shall

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\* Ishwar Harris, 1984 Reprinted from "Asian Thought and Society" An International Journal : State university of New York.

continue my *yatra* (journey) and ceaselessly carry on the efforts in that direction. May God give me strength for achieving this goal."<sup>2</sup> He dared to tackle one of the chronic problems of India, i.e., the problem of land, and made it an important means of achieving his objectives. Today; the land problem is still with us, but Bhoodan has captured the imagination of many people. Behind this imagination is the legacy of Vinoba, who had tirelessly given himself as a living sacrifice for the poor of India. After Gandhi's death, Vinoba began his *padayatra* (journey of foot) to meet the poor of India. While the leaders of now independent India were engaged in the task of nation building, Vinoba was concerned with the fate of Harijans and the poor villagers. It was this dedication, an unprecedented concern for the masses, which brought him to Telangana in 1951, where Bhoodan was born.<sup>3</sup>

### **Sarvodaya : The Fundamental Basis of Bhoodan**

Vinoba Bhave did not invent Bhoodan, rather he discovered it. Nevertheless, this discovery came to Vinoba, and he transformed it into a new vision. When one stops to analyze the motivating factors behind his thought and activities, which gave his vision a lasting dimension, one recognizes that Bhoodan was not an isolated event in his life. He had been prepared to receive the insights of Bhoodan for a long time. To a large extent, its discovery was part of his continuing *Sadhana* (self-search). For sure, he happened to be in the right place at the right time, but the fact that he used this opportunity, and gave it a new reality, tells us something about the wisdom of Vinoba. Categorization is difficult and tedious process. However, if there is one concept which helps us to understand his wisdom, it is the concept of *Sarvodaya*. A brief look at this philosophy will facilitate our understanding of the Bhoodan Movement.

Sarvodaya, generally translated as "Welfare of all", was a philosophy made popular by Mahatma Gandhi. There is some argument whether he borrowed this word from Jainism or coined it on his own. In any event, *Sarvodaya* is mainly associated with Gandhian thought. On Gandhi's own admission, he derived the essence and meaning of this word from Ruskin's book, *Unto This Last*. He translated this work into Gujarati, entitling it *Sarvodaya* (The Welfare of All).<sup>4</sup> Ruskin's original title suggested Biblical affiliation. For it is in the teaching of Jesus that one finds the admonition for serving the least of mankind.<sup>5</sup> Gandhi understood the teachings of *Unto This Last* to be : (1) The good of the individual

contains in the good of all. (2) A lawyer's work has the same worth as that of a barber's, in as much as everyone has the same right of earning their living from their work. (3) A life of labour, which involves tilling the soil or handicraft, is a life worth living.<sup>6</sup> He set out to put these principles into practice in his life. As Gandhi refined these ideas, a new vista of political, social, and economic revolution opened before him. Consequently, many such programs as *Charkha* (Spinning), *Nai Talim* (New Education), *Shanti Sena* (Peace Brigade), *Cottage Industries*, *Harijan Uplift* etc., became a byproduct of Sarvodaya thinking. In order to achieve *Swaraj* (self-rule), and eventually to establish *Ramraj* (Kingdom of Rama), Gandhi exercised Sarvodaya philosophy. For him, *Ahimsa* (non-violence) became a tool, *Satyagraha* (truth force) a means, and *Shanti* (peace), the goal of this philosophy.

It was Gandhi's quest to lay the foundation of "*Sarvodaya Samaj*" (A Society for the Welfare of All). Vinoba joined hands with him in this quest. In 1947, when India became an independent nation, Gandhi refused his participation in any institutional politics of holding office. In fact, he encouraged the leaders of the Congress Party to dissolve this body, and become an agent for a "Moral Force" as a non-political entity. Vinoba followed Gandhi's advice, and set out to do constructive work for the establishment of *Sarvodaya Samaj*. With Vinoba, Sarvodaya philosophy and practice moved beyond innovations made by Gandhi. On one hand he interpreted the hidden meanings of Sarvodaya philosophy, and at the same time he drew its implications for constructive programming. His goal became *Antyodaya* (welfare of the last). He wrote, "The proper rendering of *Unto This Last* would be *Antyodaya* (Uplift of the Last) rather than *Sarvodaya*. Of course the last one's uplift is included in the uplift of all; but in emphasizing the last the object is that work should begin from that end".<sup>7</sup> What did Vinoba mean by starting "from that end"? He was thinking of those that society had forgotten—the *Harijans*—the last in the Indian scheme of social stratification. Through Bhoodan, Vinoba begged land for them.

Throughout his life, via talks and speeches, Vinoba illucidated the meaning of Sarvodaya. He called it a "New Mantra" through which the real dream of *Swaraj* could be realized.<sup>8</sup> For him, "self-rule" did not mean simply freedom from the British and the right of self-government. It involved bringing into reality the dream of equality for all people. Such an equality was only possible through spiritual means. Consequently, Sarvodaya was not merely a philoso-

phical concept, but a religious ideal. For Vinoba it involved a *Samuhik Sadhana* (collective spiritual efforts), a new form of Satyagraha (truth force) which affected the entire humanity.<sup>9</sup> Hidden in this mantra was his spiritual ideal that one must learn to live for others. He maintained that through love and sacrifice equality of all people could be achieved. Emphasizing such an ideal, Vinoba said, "All activities throughout my life have been motivated by the sole purpose of achieving the union of heart."<sup>10</sup> In his efforts to establish a Sarvodaya Samaj, he drew upon the resources of various religions. He advocated that the age of politics and religion was over, but the age of science and spirituality was drawing upon us. Like many Vedantins, he proposed a kind of "Religious Universalism". Behind this universalism was a criticism of narrow religious attitudes that divide mankind. He insisted that the unifying principle behind all religions was the ideal of "Love". Thus, for him "Sarvodaya depends upon service through understanding in a *spirit of love*."<sup>11</sup> Once, while visiting the famous temple of Amarnath, Vinoba failed to enter the temple to have a darshana of the diety. When questioned by his associates, he simply replied that he had been having desired darshan of the lowliest and last of India every day. Furthermore, his religion consisted in *loving* all, compassion towards the poor, and *devotion* to truth.<sup>12</sup>

For Vinoba, the fundamental meaning of Sarvodaya is unity of all mankind. This unity can be realized only when we succeed in creating a *Vishva Manava* (universal man). He emphatically asserts that it should be our goal to become "universal beings," not proud of any particular country, not persuaded by a particular religion, and not bound by any denomination or caste.<sup>13</sup> Thus, he extends the meaning of Sarvodaya from its narrow bounds to a universal scope. He appealed to all religions to unite in the creation of a universal being. Reflecting on Islam, he once said, "The Quaran teaches; *Allah-hu-Wahid* meaning God is one. We have been taught it all along. Now we would have to add : MAN IS ONE—'Insan-hu-wahid.' While old spirituality stresses the unity of God, the new spirituality stresses the unity of man."<sup>14</sup> Within Hinduism, Vinoba emphasized the importance of Vedanta, and its insistence on the unity between *Atman* (self) and *Brahman* (The Ultimate Reality). If the divine exists in all individuals, then every one is equal in the eyes of God. Furthermore, man's union with God establishes his union with the rest of humanity. Consequently, there should be no division based on caste, colour, or creed, Vinoba was particularly critical of the Caste System as it existed within the Indian Society. He believed

that all *Varnas* (castes) should exist within each other. What that meant was that everyone should have the poise and wisdom of the *Brahmins*, strength and valour of the *Kshatriyas*, skill and efficiency of *Vaishyas*, and the humility and the spirit of service of the *Shudras*.<sup>15</sup>

One of the important goals of Sarvodaya is to radically change the existing political system. It does not propagate a violent revolutionary change, rather seeks to create a "third force" through peaceful means. Vinoba writes, "I fervently believe in the efficacy of the "Third Force" which is entirely different from the two forces of *Himsa*—violence—and *Danda Shakti*—legislative punishment."<sup>16</sup> The third force is *Lok-niti* (politics of the people) as opposed to *Raj-niti* (the politics of power).<sup>17</sup> Vinoba does not hesitate to criticize even the democratic system. For it seeks the good of the majority. On the other hand the goal of Sarvodaya is not the greatest good of the greatest number, but the greatest good of all people. Consequently, even if a single person is suffering, the happiness of all others is of no account. At this point one is reminded of the parable of "The lost sheep" as told by Jesus.<sup>18</sup> In this parable, a shepherd goes after a single lost sheep, leaving the 99 behind. He is not content until the entire flock reaches safely. This parable exemplifies the spirit of Sarvodaya. According to *Lok-niti*, people are responsible for each other's welfare and do not look up to the government for help. Vinoba regrets that in contemporary India people have no faith in the "power of the people." He feels that during the British occupation, Indians took things in their own hands as they sought independence. However, since independence, in general, people expect the government to solve their problems. It is people who have made the government powerful. Unless the power is transferred back to the people, a *Samyayogi* society will remain a dream.

Sarvodaya's equalitarian emphasis is certainly communistic, but it does not adhere to the Communist Political ideology. Vinoba addressed Karl Marx as *Mahamuni* (great saint), but abhorred the tactics used by his followers for coercion. He felt that there were three types of people seeking Utopia. First, there were those who felt that a perfect age (*Satya Yuga*) existed in the past, and therefore advocated a return to ancient times. Vinoba called them *Purana-vadins*. Second, there were those who felt that the perfect age would exist only in the future. Such are the communists. Both of these groups are *Satya-Yugavadis* (proponents of a perfect age). Third, there were those who felt that the perfect age could be created in the present. These are the followers of Sarvodaya. Vinoba called them

*Satya-Yugakaris* (workers of a perfect age).<sup>19</sup> In spite of his difference with communism, he had kind words for its followers. It appears that through Sarvodaya he sought to infuse spirituality into their movement. He is reported to have said, "I consider communists as my brothers, I have got some friends among communists and it is not a crime to be a communist. To be a communist is to serve the poor."<sup>20</sup> He requested them not to wage violence, but to work for the people, and assured them of his cooperation.<sup>21</sup> During the long history of Bhoodan, the Sarvodaya workers have come in close contact with the communists on several occasions. Today there is a growing competition between the two groups as they work to gain support of the *Harijans* in South India. From the Sarvodaya perspective, its *Lok-Sevaks* (servants of the people) are attempting to heal the wounds of the people caused by the violence instigated by the communists. It appears that the Gandhians will always *cooperate* with the communists, but will never compromise with them. For there are fundamental difference in their respective viewpoints. As one writer puts it, Karl Marx proposed, "Labourers of the world, unite. You have to lose nothing but your chains" Vinoba seems to be saying. "People of the world, unite and shed off your possessiveness! Your chains then will fall down."<sup>22</sup>

In the economic sphere, Sarvodaya believes that everything in the world is owned by the community. Consequently, there is no room for individual property or private ownership. Vinoba believes that God is the lord of the universe, and therefore he is the owner of all things. Man is a designated caretaker of all natural resources. Furthermore, all living things have equal rights. One detects a similarity with the Christian concept of "Stewardship" in Sarvodaya. However, this stewardship is extended to the protection of animals. Vinoba's program of "Cow protection" is directly related to this ideology. He has also insisted on the equal rights of women. His emphasis on *Stri Shakti* (female power) is also derived from Sarvodaya thinking. In Sarvodaya economy, the axiom that "small is beautiful" holds ultimate value. Thus, village economy occupies its major attention. Both Gandhi and Vinoba have insisted on *Gram Swaraj*. According to them the village is to be looked upon as a family, where everyone is concerned with each other's welfare. Under Vinoba's vision of *Gramdan* (village donation), the village land is to be owned by *Gram Sabha* (village committee) and distributed for cultivation among the farmers. The produce is to be consumed by the villagers. As a matter of fact, all basic needs are to be met by the villagers themselves. In the village economy, Vinoba

discourages the use of conventional money. The exchange of goods is to be promoted (barter system). He also discourages lavish expenditures on religious rituals and weddings. The villagers are encouraged to settle their disputes among themselves, rather than wasting money and time at city courts.

A critical feature of Sarvodaya economy is the concept of *Dan* (gift). The people are to be trained in sacrificing their possessions for the sake of others. The "possession" are not described only in terms of things. One possesses knowledge, strength, as well as material things. According to the precept of *Dan*, all individuals are capable of giving something for the welfare of a fellow human being. Thus, one can give *Sampathi-dan* (gift of property), *Shram-dan* (gift of labour), *Gupta-dan* (secret gift), *Bhoodan* (gift of land), or even *Jivan-dan* (gift of life). One can certainly imagine various other kinds of dans. The important thing is that Sarvodaya believes in the spirit of renunciation. Vinoba's own life is a prime example of such renunciation. Needless to say that Sarvodaya economy is not directed toward profit making, but service. And, the entire economic system is spiritualized. In order to achieve these objectives, Sarvodaya always upholds the way of *Ahimsa*. In the final analysis, the ultimate goal of Sarvodaya is to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Vinoba and Gandhi have called it *Ramraj* (Kingdom of Rama). On this issue Vinoba writes, ".....when *Swaraj* becomes a reality in each individual village, we call it *Gramraj*. When all the people of the village have reached maturity of judgment and there is never any need to coerce anyone, that is *Ramraj*.<sup>24</sup>

Now we come to *Bhoodan*. Like many other constructive programs, many of which were started by Gandhi, *Bhoodan* remains one of the most important constructive programs under Sarvodaya. Behind it is the Gandhian search to find a solution to the problems of India's masses. Vinoba through his own vision added an extra dimension to this search. *Bhoodan* was discovered by Vinoba at a very pivotal moment in the Indian history. India had just received its independence, and was faced with enormous problems. The newly formed government was looking for various avenues to help the villagers, where the majority of Indians live even to this day. Vinoba's movement gave the Indian government a direction and helped it to focus its attention on some critical problems connected with land. Granted that India has only paid a "Lip service" to Vinoba's programs, the work of some independent organizations that believe in Vinoba's quest, is commendable. In

my judgment, Vinoba could not have provided the kind of leadership he has, if he had not been a follower of Sarvodaya philosophy. It was Sarvodaya thinking that helped him to formulate his ideas on Bhoodan. At the same time, Bhoodan provided him with the opportunity to further crystallize his notions of Sarvodaya. Consequently, his ideas on such notions of *Jan-Shakti* (people power), *Loke-niti* (Politics of the people), *Seva* (service), *Gramraj* (Village Rule), *Dan* (Various gifts), *Ahimsa* (Non Violence), *Samyayoga* (Yoga of equality), *Ramraj* (Kingdom of God), etc., have direct consequence for Bhoodan. An attempt is still being made in India to implement the spirituality of these ideas wherever Bhoodan work is being undertaken. Thus, Sarvodaya and Bhoodan are intergrally related. Bhoodan is indeed a concrete manifestation of Sarvodaya.

### **Receiving the Gifts : The First Phase of Bhoodan**

During his legendary Telangana visit in 1951, Vinoba was as much surprised as the others, when Ramchandra Reddy donated 100 acres of land to him. The Harijans had requested only 80 acres for 40 families, and Vinoba was thinking of approaching the government authorities in order to have the land allotted to them. Instead, he put the request to the villagers themselves, and received the first gift of land. By his own admission, Vinoba was spellbound. That night he could not sleep, but brooded over the religious nature of his experience. Reflecting on this event, he later wrote, "I at once realized that the universal force wants to execute something new,"<sup>25</sup> As an astute mathematician he calculated that he needed 50 million acres of land for the poor of India. He vowed to obtain this land by putting his case to the people. By the time he returned from Telangana to Paunar Ashram, he had received 12,000 acres of land in a little over two months period. Soon he gave the name of *Bhoodan-Yagna* to his movement. In the years to come he made it a vital means of practicing Ahimsa.

When Prime Minister Nehru invited Vinoba to come to Delhi to discuss the proposal of the National Planning Commission, regarding India's first Five Year Plan, he walked to Delhi from Paunar. He covered the distance of 800 miles in 2 months, receiving more land on the way. To the Planning Commission, Vinoba proposed a Gandhian vision of solving the problems of the poor, insisting on small village industries. Realizing that the government was more interested in big industries, Vinoba took to his *padayatra*. Gradually, he began to apply Sarvodaya ideals to Bhoodan. He envisioned Bhoodan as an all comprehensive movement directed to the reform

in all walks of life, He insisted, "In Bhoodan, distribution of land is not the only question. It aims at the moral regeneration of the whole nation..."<sup>26</sup> Thus, he marched from village to village carrying his moral revolution to the people. When his critics complained that Vinoba was fragmenting the land, he insisted that he was uniting the hearts. He gave a new dimension to the movement by adding *Premdan* (Gift of love), *Buddhi Dan* (Gift of wisdom), *Shram-Dan* (Gift of labour) and *Sampathi Dan* (Gift of property) to *Bhoodan*. Through these mediums he sought to establish a new moral order. He wrote, "I believe that this Bhoodan work of mine is a mission of *Dharma-Charkha-Pravartana* the establishment of a righteous order."<sup>27</sup> His goal was to found a *Samyayogi* society (a society of equals).

In 1952, Vinoba added a new concept to his movement. It was called *Gramdan* (Village gift). While on his *padayatra* in North India, he requested that an entire village should become a *Gramdan* village. Consequently, the village land was to be owned collectively, not individually. The title deeds were to be transferred to the *Gramsabha* (village Assembly), constituted of the village adults. The Assembly could give 1/20 of the land for redistribution. They were encouraged to contribute one day's income per month to a *Gram Kosh* (Village chest). The facets of the program were to be: *Prapti* (assigning of the land to the village Assembly), *Pusti* (transferring of the land through legal channels), *Nirman* (development), and retention of 19/20 of the land by the owner without the right to sell or mortgage the land without the permission of the village Assembly, and *Arohan* (to climb up through progressive stages and to resolve all conflicts).<sup>28</sup> The seven-fold objectives were as follows:

1. Elimination of poverty.
2. Awakening the feeling of love and affection in land lords.
3. Strengthening the society by eliminating divisions.
4. To receive the Indian values of *Yagna*, (sacrifice), *dana* (giving), *tapas* (renunciation).
5. Building a new social order based on voluntary labour, non-possession, co-operative, and self reliance.
6. Presenting a common platform for all political parties.
7. Helping world peace.<sup>29</sup>

In 1953 during his travels in the state of Bihar, Vinoba emphasized the idea of *Shramdan* (gift of labour) along with *Gramdan*. He gave a new song, which became a mantra for *Shramdan*. He sang,

"*Bhai Kudali chalate Chalo, mitti ka sona banate chalo !*" (On, go on with the spade and turn the soil into gold).<sup>30</sup> In the same year he was beaten along with the Harijans, as they tried to desegregate the Baidyanath Temple in Bihar.<sup>31</sup> Also in 1953, during a Sarvodaya conference, Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the outstanding politicians of the time decided to join Vinoba's movement. He had been a Marxist and an influential exponent of socialism. But he was not convinced that the Gandhain ideology was the answer for the future of India. However, Vinoba's speech at a conference changed his mind. In 1954 he offered his life to the Sarvodaya movement. Thus the concept of *Jivan dan* (gift of life) was added to movement. At the time, Jayaprakash's conversion from politics to Sarvodaya was highly hailed, and it gave a tremendous moral boost to the cause of Vinoba. Impressed by J. P.'s dedication, Vinoba also made a fresh pledge by stating, "I dedicate my life to the non-violent revolution, based on Bhoodan-Yagna, and village industry oriented programs."<sup>32</sup> Now Gramdan received moral support of many political leaders. It added respectability to the movement. Even the communists of India (Namboodripad and followers) gave sanction to Vinoba's program.

In 1956 Vinoba was greatly distressed by the outbreak of violence in the state of Bihar. He had hoped that Gramdan will bring a moral fervour in Bihar and his non-violent revolution will succeed. However, the growing tension among the Landlords and mistreatment of Harijans caused violent riots. Reflecting on the situation, Vinoba spoke, "I declare I have not achieved success and I accept my defeat. People might say that I got lakhs of acres in Bhoodan and hundreds of villages in Gramdan. It has given immense hope to the people but I confess that I am in a terrible agony..."<sup>33</sup> In 1957 while visiting Kanyakumari in South India, Vinoba took his famous pledge to continue his yatra until Gram-Swaraj is established. He asked God to give him strength for achieving this goal.<sup>34</sup> In the same year he emphasized the idea of *Shanti Sena* (peace brigade) an ideal proposed by Mahatma Gandhi. He asked all the villages to support *Shanti Sainiks* (peace soldiers) by maintaining a *Sarvodaya patra* (pot) in their homes. The *Sainiks* were to receive grain from this pot for maintenance, as they performed their peace mission on a voluntary basis. He came upon the idea of keeping *Sarvodaya patra* in 1958 during his visit to Karnataka. It was here that he also invented the slogan *Jai Jagat* greetings and victory to the world.<sup>35</sup> In 1960 a unique miracle took place. During one of his marches, Vinoba entered the infamous Chambal Valley infested with dacoits. The government had spent enormous amounts of money to control the

menacing dacoits and had failed. Upon reaching this area, Vinoba appealed to the dacoits to give up their arms. At his initial request, twenty-one of them surrendered to him. Touched by the spirit of the event, one writer stated, "(It were) as if violence was surrendering its arms before non-violence,"<sup>36</sup> In the years to come hundreds of dacoits surrendered their arms. At present some of these men are still serving their sentences at the Delhi jail.

In 1962 India was shaken by the Indo China conflict. Vinoba condemned the violent means to settle the issue, but supported the government policies in this conflict. He used this occasion to emphasize the importance of *Gram Swaraj*. He felt that the nation could be strong only when internal solidarity is maintained. Thus, he continued his *padayatra* and preached self reliance in food and clothing in the villages.<sup>37</sup> In 1963 and 1964 Vinoba's movement was filled with new enthusiasm. During this period Vinoba introduced the concept of *Sulabhadan* (easy gift). It was an attempt to make the Gramdan easier and more feasible. The "four points" program which he introduced was as follows: 1) The ownership of land was to be transferred to the *Gram Sabha* (Village Committee). 2) The landholders were to donate 1/20th of their land for landless. 3) 1/40th of the annual income in money or kind was to be submitted to the village pool. 4) From each family in the village, an adult was to become a member of *Gram Sabha*.<sup>38</sup> The success of this program led Vinoba to add the notion of *Prakhanda dan* (Block gift) to his movement. According to this scheme, if 85 percent of the villages in a block decided to opt for Gramdan, then a *Prakhanda dan* was to be proclaimed. During these years, Vinoba received much success in the state of Bihar, and in 1969 the entire state of Bihar was declared as part of Bihardan. In October of 1969, the year India was celebrating Gandhi centenary with great enthusiasm, the gift of Bihar in Gramdan was celebrated as *Rajagraha*. In the same year Vinoba returned to his Ashram in Paunar, and stayed there until his death in 1982.

### **Shaping the vision : The Second Phase of Bhoodan**

In 1969, a new organisation was born in the state of Tamilnadu, which held a great promise for the Bhoodan Movement and for Sarvodaya. It was a co-operative venture to develop the Bhoodan land under Sarvodaya ideals. It was called "Sarva Seva Farms." The architect of this scheme was Mr. Giovanni Ermiglia, a representative of *Movimento Sviluppo a pace* of Torino, Italy. In collaboration with Tamilnadu Sarvodaya Mandal, and many constructive

workers, the work of Sarve Seva Farms was started in the state of Tamilnadu. The primary goal of this infant organization was to distribute the land obtained under Bhoodan among the poor and the Harijans. Moreover, it was deemed necessary to apply wholistic approach to their development, instead of merely handing over the land to them. It was a unique experiment in putting to test, in concrete situations, the Sarvodaya ideology as preached by Gandhi and Vinoba.

For about a decade 'Sarva Seva Farms' worked quietly but steadily, primarily in South India, under the umbrella of Tamil Nadu Sarvodaya Mondal, a state level body to carry out the work of Sarvodaya. In 1978 it achieved its own legal status and was registered as the Association for Sarva Seva Farms' (ASSEFA). The head office of this body is located in Madurai, Tamilnadu. A co-ordinating office which came into existence in 1979 is located in New Delhi. ASSEFA began its work on one farm of 44 acres, which involved about 22 allottees. By 1980 it had extended its work to 55 farms, 4,118.85 acres of land, and 1,840 allottees.<sup>39</sup> By 1980, the work of ASSEFA was being carried out in the states of Tamilnadu, Bihar, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan. By 1982, the workers projected to undertake similar programs in Karnataka, Andhra and Madhya Pradesh. Ultimately this program hopes to reach every state in India, where Bhoodan land needs development.<sup>40</sup> Presently the Association operates two training centres to train the workers, who actually help in the field work. One is located in the state of Tamilnadu and the other in Maharashtra. Further plans to open new training centres depend on the extent to which this co-operative venture to establish Sarvodaya Communities succeeds in the future. Unaffected by the political and ideological tensions which penetrated the Sarvodaya Movement in the 1970's and virtually brought it to a serious crisis, ASSEFA is marching ahead with its development programs. It has the blessing of Vinoba as well as of those who are ideologically opposed to him. The constructive workers in the Sarvodaya Movement call it the 'Second Phase of Bhoodan.'

Although the foremost objective of ASSEFA is to create a Sarvodaya society, its immediate goals are as follows:<sup>41</sup>

1. To engage in reclamation and cultivation of Bhoodan, Gramdan, ceiling surplus land, and waste land for rehabilitation of the backward and poor in the rural areas of India.
2. To provide necessary implements for these projects.

- 3. To carry out the reclamation process in such a way to recover the agricultural capital, and to reinvest it in further reclamation work.
- 4. To help start small “agro-industries” for the benefit of the rural poor.
- 5. To train the rural poor farmers in modern techniques of management.
- 6. To provide employment to those engaged in the projects and encouraging them in co-operation, collective responsibility, and reciprocal assistance.
- 7. To facilitate and encourage independent thinking among the allottees through exchange of knowledge, experience, and free discussion on relevant questions, in order to broaden their horizon and ban “parties’ propaganda and dogmatic assertions.”
- 8. To make the allottees educated citizens “inculcate the concept of rights and reciprocal duties and community living.”
- 9. In order to achieve these objectives, the organization will engage in rehabilitation work directly or via other organizations, raise funds within India and abroad, employ workers collaborate and co-operate with other agencies, buy, hold, sell, or dispose properties, receive donations from within India and abroad, and carry out the objectives of the Association effectively on non-profit basis, reinvesting any income for the extension of the objectives.

In order to achieve these objectives, ASSEFA is actively engaged in numerous projects most of those located in Tamilnadu. The major emphasis is given to agricultural production and cottage industries. The following statistics illustrate the growth of ASSEFA since its beginning in 1969.<sup>42</sup>

**The Growth of Farms:**

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Farms</i>
1969	1
1970	1
1971	1
1972	0
1973	2
1974	0
1975	4
1976	1
1977	4

1978	7
1979	15
1980	14
	<hr/>
	50

### The Growth in Farms Acreage:

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Farms</i>
1969	44.00
1970	26.00
1971	33.45
1972	0
1973	250.00
1974	0
1975	93.17
1976	33.77
1977	140.68
1978	243.89
1979	1,010.45
1980	1,943.44
	<hr/>
	4,118.45

### The Growth in Farms Families:

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Allottee Families</i>
1969	22
1970	13
1971	13
1972	0
1973	94
1974	0
1975	52
1976	25
1977	64
1978	203
1979	337
1980	1,017
	<hr/>
	1,840

### Growth in Farm Production:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Production in Kgs.</i>
1970-71	11,930
1971-72	64,047
1972-73	130,795
1973-74	308,998
1974-75	325,005
1975-76	243,498
1976-77	246,252
1977-78	322,050
1978-79	217,473
	-----
	1,870,048

### Location of the Farms in India:

<i>State</i>	<i>No. of Farms</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Families</i>
1. Tamilnadu	35	3,100.84	1,508
2. Bihar	7	470.01	197
3. Rajasthan	1	85.00	22
4. Maharashtra	7	463.00	113
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	50	4,118.85	1,840

The success of ASSEFA depends on many Sarvodaya leaders, officials of the Bhoodan Boards, many State Government Departments, and all the allottees who work the land. However, a major role is played by the donor agencies, most of which are peace organizations of the West. Some of these agencies are: Movimento Sviluppo E Pace (Torino, Italy), Oxfam (England), Arbeiterwohlfahrt (West Germany), Comite Catholique contra La Faim et Pour Le Development (France), Caritas Italiana (Rome, Italy), Commission Des Communautés Europeennes (Brussels), and Action in Distress (London). According to ASSEFA, several Canadian agencies have also expressed interest and concern in its work.<sup>43</sup> Within India, many Indian industrialists are beginning to show interest in the Bhoodan work undertaken by ASSEFA. However, extensive 'Consciousness raising' programs need to be implemented. ASSEFA is actively moving in this direction.<sup>44</sup>

The actual field work of ASSEFA begins by allotting the Bhoodan land to certain deserving families. Most of these families constitute of tribal groups, poor farmers and Harijans. The Association also

advances to them money and agricultural implements to work the land. The allottee promises to pay back, once the land begins to yield crops. Eventually, the farmers become self-sufficient and ASSEFA retrieves all of its investments, which are to be engaged in other projects. In this manner a rolling fund is established. In many areas government and co-operative banks have come forward to loan the money to the farmers. Usually government subsidies are allowed to a person holding up to 5 acres of land. In some case ASSEFA advance is recovered as soon as the bank grants the loan to the allottees. Thus, through the co-operation of banks, government, and other social work agencies, dream of economic independence for the poor is being realized. ASSEFA's work is not limited to agricultural productivity. The *Sevaks* participate in community and attempt at equipping the farmers, in solving own conflicts and problems. Regular meetings are held with the villagers, where programs, activities, planning and progress are evaluated.

In many new settlements in Tamilnadu, *Sarvodaya Balavadis* (School for children) are run on high standards. The *Sevaks* also provide the Sarvodaya literature to the farmer and help them to understand its ideals. In some settlements, Universal religious services based on Sarvodaya Spirituality are run for the benefit of the farmers. Recreation and cultural activities are organised to keep the community developing. Through many such activities it is hoped that a Sarvodaya Society would be established in certain developing sectors of India. The Sarvodaya workers of Tamilnadu are enthusiastic about sharing a particular success story they associate with the village of Utchapaty.<sup>45</sup> It is their belief that here the ideal of a Sarvodaya society is being achieved. And, if it can happen here, it can happen elsewhere.

In recent years ASSEFA has taken most organized step to develop the Bhoodan land than ever taken before. In some ways it has achieved a certain goal which Vinoba could not. However, the future of its success depends on many factors. According to its organizers, in the years to come this organization will need more financial support from the Indian industrialists, government, and banks, Vinoba received about 4 million acres of land in Bhoodan. Out of this, only 1 million was distributed to the landless. Furthermore, in many cases land was distributed without any organization or wholistic program for development. ASSEFA has taken it upon itself to approach the problem in a systematic manner. The need for development exists in many states throughout India, where many blocks of Bhoodan land are

available. And, it has not even touched the land classified under Gramdan. Needless to say that the potential for the future is enormous, and awaits the dawn of the 'Third Phase of Bhoodan.'

### **Critical Evaluation: An Assessment**

In the preceeding pages an attempt was made to present the story of Bhoodan and its mission. Those engaged in this movement are aware that it is not free from many problems that beset it. Some problems stem from ideological differences, while others are caused by its institutional nature. A critical look helps us to put things into perspective.

The supporters of Vinoba Bhave are apt to point out that Bhoodan has been unique medium to uphold Gandhian values. It has been involved in a humanization process while many industrial societies have become victim to dehumanization under technological revolution. In the twentieth century when man has become alienated from humanity and from himself, Sarvodaya is preventing this social sickness by treating small communities. Here people are left to interact with each other and their environment on a personal basis. In the technological age when the emphasis is on "bigness" of things, Bhoodan believes in the slogan of "Small is beautiful" in many spheres of life. Here, the consumer economy is challenged by less production and respect for material things. In the face of a worldwide ecological crisis, man is called to be attuned to his natural physical environment, and stop its exploitation. Politically, it aims to hand over the power to the people by encouraging self-rule. It concerns itself with the "Havenots" who have been neglected and have lost their rightful place in the mainstream of society. Above all it seeks to spiritualize culture by implementing a Gandhian world view through non-violent means.

Sarvodaya in general and Bhoodan in particular have to face up to their critics, who are many. There are those who feel that Sarvodaya is taking society backward into the past. India should rise out of an agricultural society and become more industrial. Furthermore, they suggest that religion and spirituality should be kept out of economic and political spheres. Instead of cottage industries, India needs bigger industries, larger production, and consumer economy. After all, India is member of an International community, and owns many debts, which can only be paid when India produces more and more. Thus, there exists an ideological conflict which causes tension. However, this tension can be creative and constructive. It provides an occasion for a healthy dialogue which is necessary for growth.

It appears that many of the ideals held by the Bhoodan movement come in direct conflict with the policies of the Indian Government. Under the circumstances one wonders if the movement will ever have the full support of the government which it seeks.<sup>46</sup> For example, India of today seems to be committed to building an industrial society. Even in agricultural sector, the emphasis is on large production and advanced farming. The technological revolution is on, and India seems willing to embrace it. It has sympathy with Sarvodaya, but in actuality it is heading toward secularization and urbanization. Furthermore, the Gandhian view of *Loka-niti* does not seem to work in the face of big government in which the Center holds the power. *Grama Swaraj* is far from being realized when villages are torn by the power struggle of many political parties. Of course, the Sarvodayaites are well aware of these problems, and are still willing to swim against the current. Vinoba had unequivocally discouraged participation in power politics. Thus, many of his followers still refuse to vote or hold political offices. They believe that Vinoba represents the true Gandhian spirit in this regard. Some express dissatisfaction over the fact that the word 'Sarvodaya' is not even mentioned in the Indian Constitution. For them, this intentional or unintentional oversight on the part of the makers of the Indian Constitution is suggestive of the defeat of the Gandhian values in India. This is a clear indication that India has chosen a secular path for itself. The opponents will argue that the secular nature of Indian government is in the best interest of all, rather than a few. I feel that the lack of government support for Sarvodaya (including Bhoodan) can best serve the people by taking its case to the people, not to the government. The real test of its success resides in its truth which it tries to convey.

Is there a symbolic meaning in the fact that the work of developing Bhoodan land as "Sarva Seva Farms" was started by Giovanni Ermiglia, who is a westerner? One could state that western "activism" is reflected in the work of ASSEFA. On the other hand could be mere economics, mainly the ability on part of the western countries to provide funds for the difficult task of land development. One should not overlook the fact that the leadership of ASSEFA is Indian, and the most talented workers who are internationally known are also Indians. Nonetheless, majority of the funds come from abroad. Why is it that in the last decade, since the emergence of ASSEFA, very little financial help has come from within India? To generate a genuine interest and concern within India for the work of Bhoodan is the most pressing challenge for ASSEFA. Unless Indians themselves

become interested in sharing a large portion of the financial burden, the danger of 'foreign dependence' will lurk behind. Some Sarvodaya workers are aware of this problem and are working to resolve it.<sup>47</sup> From this discussion one need not conclude that western support is to be discouraged.<sup>48</sup> ASSEFA is a unique venture in the East-west co-operation. Furthermore, Sarvodaya ideology has a universal dimension, and is not geographically limited to India. An international co-operation in its work is most befitting. It provides an opportunity for diverse people to share in a common goal of helping those that society has the tendency to forget. In India this experiment is proving to be a good example for the rest of humanity.

One of the most critical problems for Sarvodaya Movement today is the organization of the weaker section of society. As an organization, it has many outstanding committees and dedicated individuals who work in them. However, when it comes to the participation of villagers in Sarvodaya programs in local levels, more results are wanting. Here the problem is not merely participation, but understanding the import of Sarvodaya ideology and its implications for their lives. In a democratic system of government there are many conflicts that take time to be resolved. The *Loka Sevakas* are convinced that in due time people can be educated to deal with their problems in a non-violent way. In certain sections of India today, there is a great tension between the Harijans and the Caste Hindus on the village levels. In some instance Harijan villages have been burned because they demanded higher wages of their landlords.<sup>49</sup> Under these circumstances, educating the weaker section in Sarvodaya thinking becomes more difficult and yet most necessary. In recent years, an organization of the weaker section, *Krantikari Kisan Mazdur Sangh* (Revolutionary Farmer Labour Association) has been formed to undertake the task of mobilizing the villagers. The work of this association is now being carried on at the national, state, and local levels.<sup>50</sup> Needless to say, their job is to mobilize, educate, and develop at the grass-root level. To what extent they succeed in their mission remains to be seen at this juncture.

The future prospect of Bhoodan is bright. The wholistic vision that it has adopted for the uplift of the poor is indeed praiseworthy. It seeks human development not only of the poor, but of all those involved in its progress. However, it has to guard itself against many dangers lest it become victim to pride, success and power. First and foremost, it must guard against measuring its success only in economic terms. As the years go by, and more reclamation and rehabilitation

work is undertaken, the capital gains are sure to increase. The real success of its mission depends on the number of hearts it manages to change. It is involved in a moral revolution, not merely an economic revolution. Failure to focus on man's moral nature would mean betraying both Gandhi and Vinoba. Surely, the economic success can be easily measured, which increases the danger of flaunting the statistics. Secondly, while Vinoba and J. P. are deceased, and there is no symbolic leader of the movement, there is a need to hand over the power to the people and not look for leaders. The real meaning of *Loka niti* is leaderless power, a power that truly resides in the people, not in one or a handful of individuals. Thirdly, as long as some western peace foundations are financially supporting the work of Bhoodan, there is that danger of dependency. In the years to come, the Indian industrialists and philanthropists must step forward to share the burden. The task of the Movement is to launch an adequate educational program to attract interested people. Failing to generate support within India will only hurt the cause of Sarvodaya. Finally, the national bodies to carry out the work of Sarvodaya must seek homogeneity within the movement. The ideological differences should be set aside if they prove to be counter-productive. In the face of *Antyodaya* (welfare unto the last) all personal prejudices need surrendering if the movement is to have a lasting impact.

There is no doubt that Bhoodan, a legacy of Vinoba Bhave has become the legacy of ASSEFA. The Third Phase of Bhoodan must see that it becomes the legacy of the people. That was Vinoba Bhave's vision when he spoke of *Gramraj* and ultimately *Ramraj*.

## FOOTNOTES

1. For detailed statistic see *A decade of Sarva Seva Farms*, a souvenir volume prepared by the Association for Sarva Seva Farms, Madurai, India.

2. Suresh Ram, *Vinoba and His Mission*, Kashi : Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, 1954, p. 194.

3. Bhoodan (Land Gift) came about as a result of Vinoba's plea to certain farmers in the village of Panchampalli. Telengana (near Hyderabad) to settle the land disputes among themselves. This area had long been a trouble spot where some farmere, outraged at the atrocities (of land lords, police and revenue officers), which were directed against them, had murdered several *deshmukhs* (land lords). The communists were also active in organizing the farmers. Vinoba came to the village to hold prayer meetings. It was in one of these meetings that one land lord, Ramchandra Reddy, donated 100 acres of his land to the farmers belonging to the untouchable caste. Vinoba liked this solution, and Bhoodan was started.

4. M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1972, p. 299.

5. Holy Bible (The King James Version), *Mathew*. Ch. 25 : 40b.

6. The Navajivan Trust, Sarvodaya, Ahemdabad : Navajivan Publishing House, 1951, p. 26.

7. VINOBA Bhawe, *Democratic Values*, Sarva Seva Sangh, Prakashan, 1961, p. 49.

8. Shriman Narayan, *Vinoba : His life and work*, Bombay. Popular Prakashan, 1970, p. 336.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

10. Vinoba Bhawe, *Democratic Values*, Kashi : Sarva Seva Sangh. Prakashan 1962, p. 203.

11. Suresh Ram, *Vinoba and His Mission*, Kashi : Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, 1954, p. 292.

12. Sri Atreya (Ed.) *Dharma Samanvya*. New Delhi : Gandhi Shanti Pratishthana, 1977, p. 117 (translation and paraphrasing are my own).

13. Suresh Ram, *Vinoba and His Mission*, Kashi : Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, 1954, p. 292.

14. Kanti Shah, *Vinoba and Gandhi*, Varanasi : Sarva Seva Sangh, Prakashan, 1970, p. 128.

15. Shriman Narayan, *Vinoba : His life and work*, Bombay : Popular Prakashan, 1970, p. 334.

16. *Ibid.*, P. 334.

17. Holi Bible (Luke 15 : 3 — 7).

18. William T. DeBary (Ed.), *Sources of Indian Tradition*, New York : Columbia University Press, 1958, Vol. II, pp. 374-375.
19. Suresh Ram, *Vinoba and His Mission*, Kashi : Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, 1954, p. 58.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 58,
21. *Ibid.*, p. 397.
22. For a detailed analysis on Vinoba's renunciation, please see my article, "Vinoba Bhave : A model and Teacher of Renunciation," *The Journal of Dharma*, Vol. V, No. 3 (July-September 1980), pp. 291-309.
23. Vinoba Bhave, *Democratic Values*, Kashi : Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1962, p. 98.
24. Daniel P. Hoffman, *India's Social Miracle* California : Naturegraph Company, 1961, p. 51.
25. Vinoba Bhave, *The Principles and Philosophy of the Bhoodan Yagna*, Tanjore : Sarvodaya Pracharalaya, 1955, p. 15.
26. Vinoba Bhave, *Democratic Values*, Kashi : Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1962, p. 126.
27. S. Dasgupta, *A Great Society of Small Communities*, Varanasi : Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1968, Ch. II.
28. Daniel P. Hoffman, *India's Social Miracle*, California : Naturegraph Company, 1961, p. 56.
29. Suresh Ram, *Vinoba and His Mission*, Kashi : Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, 1954, p. 97.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
31. Kanti Shah, *Vinoba : Life and Mission*, Varanasi : Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1979, p. 55.
32. Suresh Ram, *Vinoba and His Mission*, Kashi : Akhil Bharat Sarva Seva Sangh, 1954, p. 163.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
35. Kanti Shah, *Vinoba : Life and Mission*, Varanasi : Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1979, p. 87.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
37. Much of this information was obtained in a private conversation with Mr. Narendra Dube (a Sarvodaya Loka Sevak from Indore) at Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, Delhi, Summer of 1980.
38. ASSEFA, *A Decade of Sarva Seva Farms*, Madurai : (no publisher given) 1979, p. 8.
39. This information was obtained from Dr. R. S. Shiwalkar, Principal of the Training Centre for Lok Sevaks (Workers who will carry out the work of ASSEFA), Wardha.
40. This information is paraphrased from *A Decade of Sarva Seva Farms* (a souvenir volume prepared by ASSEFA in 1979), p. 9. For detailed information the reader must consult this volume.

41. This information is taken from *A Decade of Sarva Seva Farms* (the souvenir volume, 1979), pp. 12-16.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

43. The task of approaching the India Industrialists had been given to Rev. Richard Keithan, a dedicated Sarvodaya worker, who had come to India as a Christian missionary, but ended up joining Sarvodaya. For his life and work see his autobiography, *Pilgrimage in India* (Bangalore : The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1973).

44. Utachapatty is located a few miles south of Madurai on the Madras Kanyakumari Road. Through great efforts and many experiments, this settlement is believed to have achieved 'Village' by ASSEFA. For the constructive workers, the Gandhian dream of Gram Swaraj is being achieved at Utchapatty.

45. Within Sarvodaya Movement, the followers of J. P. are more apt to involve themselves in politics as history has shown. The followers of Vinoba continue to discourage any such involvement.

46. During his visit to the United States in 1980., I raised the issue of "financial dependency" with Rev. Richard Keithan, who is a Sarvodaya worker in Tamilnadu. He reported that he was aware of this problem and was working to generate the interest of the Indian industrialists to support the Bhoodan work financially.

47. According to S. Jagannathan, Chairman, ASSEFA (1980); the problem of foreign dependency is not a crucial issue because all of the money which ASSEFA receives from the west shall be returned in due time.

48. The incident in Tanjore district in Tamilnadu is a case in point. Many Sarvodaya workers are working ceaselessly to help resolve the conflicts through peaceful means. It is here that a mass murder of the Harijans has occurred.

49. The convenor of this organisation is S. Jagannathan, Chairman, ASSEFA. It was basically his dream to organize the weaker section of the community.

# Practical Utopianism : a Gandhian Approach to Rural Community Development in India\*

## Introduction

In conclusion to her definitive study of the political economy of India since Independence, Frankel emphasises the point that radical agrarian reform in the rural sector is necessary if India is to achieve the economic, social and political goals that were announced at Independence. She concludes that

“Whether the aim is to achieve sustained economic growth or to reduce social disparities or to consolidate strong political institutions that can bypass local elites to penetrate the villages, it is essential to alter the pattern of economic concentration in the rural sector. This involves some significant redistribution of productive assets, particularly land, to ensure minimum levels of viability to larger numbers of small holdings. It also requires some degree of change in agrarian organisations from individual to co-operative patterns of economic activity.”

The condition of the landless poor in village India was of course, a key concern of Gandhi. Does Gandhi's approach to rural reconstruction through what became known as the constructive programme have any relevance to contemporary India? The aim of this article is to present an account of the background and current activities of one particular agency which is tackling the related problems of landlessness and rural development in India from a specifically Gandhian perspective. Implicit in the discussion that follows is the thesis that the Gandhian approach to the issues of the economic, social and moral regeneration of India is as relevant today as was during the pre-Independence period.

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## Gandhi's Legacy

For Gandhi the achievement of national Independence was only the first stage in the Indian revolution. The second, and more important stage, was to be a non-violent social revolution. Shortly before he was assassinated he wrote :

“The Congress has won political freedom, but it has yet to win economic freedom, social and moral freedom. These freedoms are harder than the political only because they are constructive, less exciting and not spectacular.”

He urged Congress to transform itself into a voluntary organisation of Lok Sevaks (Servants of the People), with workers going amongst the villagers to help them achieve true swaraj, full self-reliant independence, economic, as well as political. Gandhi's ideal of sarvodaya (the welfare of all) envisaged a reconstructed Indian village society with people using simple handtools in agriculture and industry, engaged in production for local use rather than profit. It was to be a society of equals, a kind of pure communism wherein each individual would place the common welfare above their own selfish interest, and the principle of, 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their need' would be paramount. This vision of a society of small, largely self-sufficient village communities, a just and nonviolent political, social and economic order, was far removed from the modern industrial society that Nehru and many of the other congress leaders eagerly anticipated.

Following Gandhi's death in January 1948, those of his co-workers who remained committed to his vision of a sarvodaya society and his emphasis on the necessity for constructive work amongst the villages gathered together to form a loosely structured organisation of Lok Sevaks, which eventually became known as Serva Seva Sangh (Association for the Welfare of All). Their third conference was held at Hyderabad in 1951. After the conference Gandhi's spiritual heir, Vinoba Bhave, travelled to the Telangana district of Andhra Pradesh where a violent struggle was taking place between the landless peasants and their feudal landlord. At one of the villages he visited on April 18th 1951 he was approached by a number of landless untouchables who asked him for help in obtaining land, Vinoba turned to the people of the village and asked whether there was somebody among them willing to give land to his brethren so that they may not die of starvation ; and a man came forward and offered a hundred acres of land.

This was the birth of what became known as the Bhoodan (land gift) movement.

### **Bhoodan—Gramdan : Towards a nonviolent revolution**

Vinoba was quite consciously searching for an answer to the problems of India's landless which would serve as an alternative to a violent revolution. He decided to embark on a series of padayatras (walking tours) throughout India, appealing to the consciences of the landlords, begging for land for the landless, achieving social reform through individual acts of charity. His goal was a three-fold revolution.

“Firstly I want to change people's hearts. Secondly I want to create a change in their lives. Thirdly I want to change the social structure. We do not aim at doing mere acts of kindness, but at creating a Kingdom of Kindness.”

Through his initiative and example Vinoba revitalised the Gandhian constructive movement.

So great was the enthusiasm for Bhoodan that a target of 50 million acres was set to be reached by the end of 1957, designated as the Year of the Land Revolution. In fact a total of 4.2 million acres had been donated by the end of the year. By that time, however, the movement was calling not for the individual's surrender of a proportion of their land but for the complete surrender of property rights in favour of the village community. This was the call for Gramdan, gift of the village, the pooling of all the village land and vesting its ownership in the community. According to one western observer,

“The substitution of Gramdan for Bhoodan represented a move from a basically individualist to a basically socialist programme.”

Whereas in a Bhoodan village the basic structure was similar to a normal Indian village except for there being a fairer distribution of land, in a Gramdan village (in theory at least) the landless ceased to be recipients of individual acts of charity and became equal members of the village community which owned the land in common.

This revolutionary character of Gramdan made it difficult to promote. Nevertheless, in the wake of Vinoba's padayatras throughout the country village after village declared itself for Gramdan. By 1964, 6807 villages had declared themselves Gramdan villages. By this

time, however. the movement was slackening, whilst the Gramdan villages themselves were generally small, very poor, and concentrated in low caste and tribal areas. Therefore a new approach was developed called Sulabh (simplified) Gramdan which represented a concession to the principles of private ownership. Under the revised Gramdan scheme the private use of land was to continue, whilst the formal ownership of the land was vested in the village community as organised in the gram sabha or village assembly. In other words, the landowner would continue to retain possession of the land for cultivation purposes and could also pass it on in inheritance, although the actual legal title to the land was held by the gram sabha. In addition, landowners were requested to donate at least 5% of their holding to the gram sabha for distribution to the landless. Also a village fund was to be established into which every family would contribute a portion of their income equivalent to one fortieth of their agricultural produce. The common affairs of the village were to be managed by the gram sabha, membership of which would be open to all adult members of the village. Disputes between villagers would not be taken to the courts but would be settled in the village itself by a social committee set up for the purpose. A village was to be declared a Gramdan village when at least 75% of its residents had expressed their approval and a sufficient number of landowners were involved so that at least 51% of the total land in the village would be covered by the Gramdan scheme.

By 1971 it was claimed that 1,68,108 villages had declared for gramdan over one quarter of the total number of villages in India. However, the majority of these were mainly declarations of intent. Only in about 5000 cases had the land titles actually been transferred to the village assembly and the village officially registered as a Gramdan village whilst, according to the Ostergaard and Curry, little more than 500 of these villages would have revealed to an observer signs of development and social reconstructions. Basically what seems to have happened is that villages would declare themselves for Gramdan in a wave of enthusiasm following a visit from the saintly Vinoba or one of his lieutenants like Jayaprakash Narayan. The leaders would then move on to the next village or location leaving the local sarvodaya workers on their own to try to implement the declaration of intent. The movement clearly lacked the financial resources and the necessary number of suitably trained personnel to carryout such a task. As a consequence a vast gap remained between the ideal picture as it might appear on paper, and the reality. Moreover, of the 4.2

million acres donated by over half a million landowners under the Bhoodan scheme, 1.85 million acres were proved to be either uncultivable or subject to legal dispute. By the late 1970, only 30% of the total land received as Bhoodan had actually been distributed to the landless by the various state Bhoodan boards which had been formed to allocate the land to the landless. Furthermore, even when land was distributed it was found that in many cases the allottees were not in a position to benefit from the land gift. They lacked the finances and the resources to reclaim land that was often unirrigated and in need of levelling. They lacked the means to acquire the necessary implements, seeds, fertilisers and draught power to start cultivation. In addition they lacked the experience and self-confidence to manage their own land; theirs had always been a life of complete and utter dependency on the local landowners. Indeed, in many cases they were too poor even to contribute their own labour to the development of their land, as they were so dependent for their day-to-day survival on the wages received as day labourers for local landowners.

During the late 1950s and 1960s, various attempts were made to deal with this situation. Bhoodan co-operatives were formed, government loans were obtained for irrigation and land reclamation purposes, development agencies intervened to offer funds for specific projects. On the whole, these efforts had only a marginal impact. Many of the schemes omitted crucial inputs—finance might be made available for irrigation but not for the purchase of draught animals or seeds. Other schemes concentrated on the economic development of the land at the cost of the necessary social and educational work amongst the villagers, with the result that the project crumbled once the sponsoring agency had withdrawn. The lesson drawn from these experiences by certain key figures involved in the Gandhian constructive work movement was that the full development of the Bhoodan and Gramdan lands required their concentration upon the promotion of the necessary qualities of self-confidence and self-reliance and the capacities for self-management and co-operative endeavour amongst the allottees, in addition to the provision of the physical and technical inputs required for the full utilisation of the newly acquired land. They were still a long way from achieving Gandhian goal of gram swaraj : self-sufficient, self-supporting and self-ruling village communities. This was the thinking behind the formation in 1969 of what has since become known as the Association of Serva Seva Farms (ASSEFA).

## **ASSEFA : a second phase of the Bhoodan-Gramdan movement**

The first Sarva Seva Farm project was started in 1969 in the Ramnad district of Tamil Nadu. A committed sarvodaya worker went to live and work with the villagers who had been allotted a total of 70 acres of Bhoodan land. Financial assistance for the development work was provided by an Italian agency that was eager to support Gandhian development work in India. Each of the thirty five families contributed the services of one young man, and together they dug wells, reclaimed the land, and participated in basic education work. Within a year the land had been reclaimed and made ready for cultivation. Following this first project a total of some seventy Sarva Seva Farms have been established, covering approximately 8000 acres of land in five states and involving nearly 3,300 families. The experience gained over the last decade and a half has led on the adoption of an approach to rural development which places equal emphasis on the development of the 'human capital' of the villagers as it does on the full utilisation of the agricultural potential of the land. How this is achieved in practice varies from village to village, project to project. There are, however, certain common features such that an *ideal-typical* account of the process can be constructed.

### **1. *The choice of location***

In choosing the site for a new project, ASSEFA relies heavily on the information received from Gandhian constructive workers 'in the field' who possess an intimate knowledge of the area, and who recommend particular Gramdan villagers or groups of Bhoodan land allottees as suitable projects for ASSEFA. In making such recommendations workers typically look for some evidence of the 'human potential' of the villagers. Have the allottees made attempts on their own behalf to develop the agricultural potential of their land? Have they shown any interest in the possibility of collective farming of the land? If a Gramdan village, have they managed to maintain an active village assembly and sought to fulfil the other accepted characteristics of a Gramdan village? In other words, have the villagers revealed a commitment to the economic development of their land through their own efforts in conjunction with an appreciation, however tenuous, of the wider vision of the Gandhian revolution?

### **2. *The drawing up of a development plan***

Once the location of a project has been decided, an assessment of the irrigation potential of the land by technical experts is made,

and an irrigation plan for the area drawn up. an Agricultural plan is also worked out in consultation with the villagers. Funding from foreign agencies, government subsidies, and commercial banks is also arranged. Perhaps inevitably at such an early stage, whilst the constant aim of ASSEFA is to engage in development work with the villagers, much of this preparatory work is done for the villagers.

### 3. *The development of group-farming*

The economic foundation of a Serva Seva Farm project is based on the location of adequate water supplies. This is followed by the digging of bore and tube wells, the construction of irrigation channels, the levelling and clearing of land ready for cultivation, and the construction of necessary buildings and storehouses. The villagers themselves are employed to do this work. The result is that they are provided with a valuable source of cash income. In addition they are directly concerned in the creation of concrete evidence that things are beginning to happen and that changes in their life conditions are on the way. Whilst this work to transform the material conditions of life is taking place, village workers (sevaks) trained and employed by ASSEFA live and work amongst the villagers, concentrating on the promotion of their confidence and capacity for collective deliberation and action through the gram sabha. A key feature of the work of these sevaks is the encouragement of the villagers to work the reclaimed land in co-operative groups, usually consisting of up to half a dozen families occupying adjacent plots of land and working around a common water source.

### 4. *Village funds, cottage industries and grain banks*

In many ways the village worker or sevak, whilst employed by ASSEFA on a modest salary equivalent to around £27 per month, acts as executive officer and advisor to the village assembly. One of their typical tasks is to encourage the habit of regular saving amongst the villagers. In part, this is motivated by a concern to promote a new orientation in the outlook of the villagers such that they start to purposely plan for the future rather than live from day to day, entrusting one's fate to God or to the local landowner. It is also informed by the felt need to impress upon the villagers that whilst their individual savings might not amount to any great sum, when the savings are pooled into a village fund then the village can begin to raise its own capital to finance its own development. The capital thus raised can be used to obtain

further loan capital from the banks and finance small cottage industries (spinning and weaving, leather working, small poultry farming ventures, the purchase of milch animals and so forth) which can provide regular cash income for the landless and underemployed members of the village community.

Financial debt to money lenders is a common feature of life in rural India. ASSEFA has sought to tackle this problem not just by improving the economic base of the village but also by attempting to strengthen the position of the villagers with regard to the sale of their produce on the open market. This is tackled by the establishment of grain banks run by the gram sabha. At harvest time, when the supply of produce outstrips demand and the market price is low, the villagers are urged to store their grain and other crops with the grain bank until such time as the market price favours the producer, when the crops are sold. The villagers are then paid the appropriate amount for their produce less whatever loans have been made to them to help tide them over the period since harvest and the deduction of a small administrative charge of around 4%. By such means the economic condition of the villagers is improved. This is necessary if for no other reason than the fact that the bulk of the money invested in the project by ASSEFA for the construction of wells and irrigation systems, purchase of seeds, fertiliser and draught animals and so on has to be repaid over a specified period. The money is then recycled to finance another project. Perhaps more importantly, it also means that the villagers themselves are made responsible in a fundamental way for their own development—it is not given to them as an unearned gift: the development of the land and the village becomes their achievement.

##### 5. *Education and conscientisation*

All those associated with ASSEFA acknowledge the key role played by the village workers (sevaks) who, through living and working alongside the villagers, act not merely as advisors and technical assistants but also work to promote a sense of self-reliance and communal responsibility amongst the villagers that transcends divisions of family, caste, class, religion and gender. In working to encourage the participation of villagers in collective decision-making processes particular attention is paid to the position of women whose domestic responsibilities, allied to the discouragement of men, have traditionally precluded them from participating in decision-making at the community level. ASSEFA

has tended to approach the women in the first instance through the establishment of Balwadies (kindergartens) and village schools. The children are thereby provided with an opportunity for basic education, whilst the women are freed to engage in agricultural work or some other economic activity. As part of their duties the teachers (who are mainly women employed and trained in Gandhian methods of education by ASSEFA) are expected to work with the women of the village—organising discussion groups, health and hygiene classes, sewing groups, literacy classes and the like. In encouraging the women to meet together for such purposes a forum is created wherein they can gain confidence in their own abilities and collective strength, and thus begin to make their voice heard in community affairs and the deliberations of the gram sabha (usually dominated by the men).

## Conclusion

By such methods, ASSEFA seeks to improve the economic conditions of the villagers whilst encouraging the emergence of a cooperative ethos in all walks of life. The ultimate goal remains Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya, the welfare of all, through cooperation and trusteeship in the economic sphere, equal participation in the political sphere, and mutual aid in the social sphere without regard for caste, creed or class. Of course, the gap between this ultimate ideal and the actual situation in the villages is often great, and the work of ASSEFA has not been beyond criticism. There is the danger through the initial emphasis on improving the economic base of the villages ASSEFA might merely facilitate the emergence of a Kulak class amongst the villagers composed of those that possess sufficient land, education and entrepreneurial ability to take advantage of the technical and financial inputs. It is true that landless villagers are still to be found within ASSEFA projects and that the material conditions of those that possess land has frequently increased disproportionately compared with the lot of the landless. There is no economic equality within the villages, neither is there equality between the sexes or castes. Furthermore, the contrast between the conditions of those villagers who benefit from ASSEFA projects and those who live without such schemes inevitably becomes more marked. Faced with such observations the ASSEFA workers would respond by acknowledging the problems whilst pointing out that development of the kind they envisage is a necessarily slow process. The establishment of village funds to finance, amongst other things, cottage industries

for the landless ; the education work among the villagers and especially with the women and children ; the location of collective decision-making in the gram sabha where all adults have a voice—these and other dimensions of their approach are all seen as part of a longer term process towards the goal of full village socialism, not just the economic improvement of the lot of a new rural employing class. Moreover, villagers are urged to extend their area of responsibility beyond their fellow villagers to embrace adjacent villages. In some respects each ASSEFA project is seen as a model to inspire others to emulate. It was realised years ago that it was largely wasted effort to spread one's material and human resources over too wide an area. Better to limit the scope to ensure genuine change in one area which would act to inspire others to demand and work for similar transformation in their own individual and collective life. As part of this process the villagers involved in ASSEFA projects are encouraged to engage in annual padayatras of their own, when they tour the neighbouring countryside trying to spread the Gandhian message of cooperative work, mutual aid and village self-reliance.

The core members of ASSEFA have always considered themselves as activists in the Gandhian nonviolent, social movement continuing his work for the social transformation of Indian life, rather than as officers in a rural development agency. One problem that faces ASSEFA as it grows in size is whether this commitment to the Gandhian (some would say utopian) vision of village socialism can be sustained. As the schemes and projects become larger in size as the spread of its activities extends beyond its original base in Tamil Nadu and the annual budget increases, so ASSEFA has had to recruit numbers of technical experts (agronomists, accountants, administrators etc.) whose commitment to the Gandhian vision gram swaraj is not necessarily as firm as that of the founder members. The danger is that ASSEFA will grow into yet another large scale, hierarchically organised, bureaucratic development agency adept at creating its own targets and imposing them on the recipients of its aid, concentrating on the attainment of tangible economic goals at the end of the wider social and political transformation that is an integral part of ASSEFA's present approach. The avoidance of such an outcome is something that demands increasing attention from ASSEFA's founder members.

To conclude on a more positive note, however, it would seem appropriate to quote from an Indian economist's observations on

India's development experience. Bearing in mind that the vast majority of India's estimated population of 700 million live in villages and that around 25% of all rural dwellers are landless, Tarlok Singh has argued that :

without transformation of the rural economy into a *progressively cooperative system* (suited to the conditions of each region), it will be virtually impossible to put all of India's manpower resources to productive use, to raise the productivity of land, labour generally, and to bring about in every rural area the development of an agro-industrial economy. These... are among the essential conditions for eradicating extreme forms of poverty as it affects the masses of landless workers, marginal and small farmers and rural artisans...

Such a transformation of economic and social life cannot be imposed from above, but must grow from the bottom upwards. From such a perspective the Gandhian vision as implemented by ASSEFA begins to appear as a very practical and relevant brand of utopianism.

# ASSEFA

## A CASE STUDY AND SOME REFLECTIONS\*

### I

The original intent was to conduct a case study of some voluntary agencies (non-governmental organisations) sharing similar concern or involved in similar activities such as development of the landless rural poor, but following different approaches and differing in their way of working. The idea was also to select agencies operating in several rural clusters in quite a few districts for a reasonably long stretch of time with varying degrees of 'success'. After some initial probings the choice fell on the Association for Sarva Sava Farms.

In terms of area of operation and scale of activities, ASSEFA is several times larger than most voluntary agencies in the country. It originated around 1969, beginning its work in Tamil Nadu.

ASSEFA was started to resettle the landless rural poor on the lands, usually waste or degraded land, acquired through Bhoodan and Gramdan movements launched by Vinoba and further broadened by Jayaprakash Narayan.

From 1951, when Vinoba launched the Bhoodan (land-gift) movement till about 1963, when the land gifts virtually came to an end, the movement collected from landowners in various parts of the country over four million acres for redistribution to the landless. Though about one-third of this land was distributed to the landless, most of the Bhoodan allottees could not cultivate the land because they did not have the resources or means to do so. For all practical purposes they remained landless wage earners.

The idea of starting Sarva Sava Farms was conceived in 1969 to bridge this gap. ASSEFA emerged from the work initiated towards this end by the Tamil Nadu Sarvodaya Mandal and the Tamil Nadu Bhoodan Board. Three individuals who played key role in translating the idea into action and establishing ASSEFA are Giovanni Ermiglia, a retired Italian Professor representing the Movimento Sviluppo E Pace (Torino, Italy), S. Jagannathan, a Sarvodaya leader, and S. Loganathan, a young activist.

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\* Ranjit Gupta, Chairman and Professor, Centre for Management in Agriculture, Indian Instt. of Management, Ahmedabad.

The first farm of 70 acres with 35 Bhoodan allottees owning and managing it was started in 1969 in Ramnad district of Tamil Nadu. It was a success. The allottees, who lived in nearby villages, worked with Loganathan to reclaim and develop the 70-acre farm. The land was levelled and cleared of rocks and scrub. Seven wells were dug. Water flowed to irrigate the entire farm and made it alive.

The 'success' generated enthusiasm. It also brought support and strengthened the team's confidence in itself to carry the work further by adding more farms. By 1976, the number of farms rose to 10. Funds for starting and running these farms came from the Movimento Sviluppo E Pace (MSP). Support from more donor agencies, including the European Economic Community (EEC), followed.

By 1976, there were 16 farms in five districts of Tamil Nadu covering about 800 acres of land and 364 Bhoodan families. It was at this stage that ASSEFA was formally founded as a registered body with headquarters at Madurai, Tamil Nadu. In terms of number of farms established and landless families resettled, the progress thereafter has been rapid (Table 1).

Table-1  
State-wise Distribution of Sarva Seva Farms  
(January 1983)

State	No. of Farms	Area (acres)	No. of families
Tamil Nadu*	36	2033	898
Bihar	15	1142	601
Maharashtra	15	1222	254
Rajasthan	1	85	22
Karnataka	1	342	66
Total	68	4824	1841

\* Excludes one project on Gramdan land and another on forest fallow land, both in Madurai district, covering 3200 acres and 1452 families.

(Source : **ASSEFA A Profile**, Madurai.)

Although development and multiplication of Sarva Seva Farms to settle the Bhoodan allottees, mostly Harijans and tribals, remains the dominant concern of ASSEFA, it has started enlarging its interest and range of activities. Since 1980 the package of activities has been both expanded and diversified to include programmes like development of animal husbandry, forestry, rural industries, health, nutrition, education and housing.

Organisationally, ASSEFA is a four-tier structure. At the all-India level there is the General Body composed of 21 members (Sarvodaya leaders) drawn from different parts of the country. The General Body decides the overall policy. For day-to day decisions there is a 5 member Executive Committee elected from among the members of the General Body.

At the second tier there are state committees to coordinate and oversee the working of the Sarva Seva Farms in the state. The state committees consist of eminent Sarvodaya leaders of the state, social workers and professionals.

At the third tier there are project committees which are responsible for planning and implementation of the projects. A typical project may cover more than one Sarva Seva Farms in a district or a block. The project committees comprise local Sarvodaya leaders and senior members of the project staff. The committee has direct access to the central organ of ASSEFA from which it receives financial, human and technical support.

The individual Sarva Seva Farms constitutes the fourth tier. The decision-making body here is the Gram Sabha (village assembly) of the allottees. ASSEFA is represented at this level by a **Sevak** (Community Worker). Financial and technical support is made available to the farm through the project committee. The ultimate test is to make the farm viable and develop the allottees' capability to manage it on their own. At this point the farm is handed over to the allottees' Gram Sabha and the project committee withdraws. So far only a few farms have been handed over to the Gram Sabha. Uchapatti is one such farm. Some aspects of this farm, which the author visited, are discussed elsewhere in the paper.

## Strengths and Limitations

The 'success' of the ASSEFA is perhaps best reflected by its growth and ability to attract young workers to work for landless poor. One with radical views may differ with their approach and ways of working. One looking for possibilities of mounting massive efforts matching the massive size of the problem may view their work and contributions as inconsequential. Both may be right. But viewed from their perspective, their size and resources, they have surely done better than most others working in similar fields.

This does not mean that they have done well in all the fields in which they are active. Where they seem to have done well, in some cases remarkably well, is in their efforts to resettle the landless on Bhoodan land.

ASSEFA is a Gandhian body sharing the values and culture of what has come to be known as Gandhism. The hold of ritualised practices and attachment to a work culture which Vinoba symbolised are still very strong. Like most Gandhian bodies the organisation is a good deal personalised around the leaders.

An ASSEFA document spells out the ASSEFA vision or "philosophy" as follows :<sup>1</sup>

"In the Development Philosophy of ASSEFA, community organization stands first. ASSEFA uses the socio-economic programmes as medium for organization, education and animation of communities, ensuring people's participation, development of local leadership and decision-making processes."

The ability to work with—as against managing—the resourceless landless with a sense of humility appears to be the foremost strength of ASSEFA. Partly because of this reason and partly because it is less professionally managed but interested in acquiring more professional competence, ASSEFA is open to researchers interested in gaining closer, even critical, understanding of its work. It has also published a few reports providing data from its internal records about the economics or viability of the Sarva Seva Farms.

Depending on the legal status of the land on which the ASSEFA farms are organised, the farms are classified into three categories, each governed by a separate set of rules :

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ASSEFA : ASSEFA Objects and Their Achievements (mimeo), p. 7.

1. *Bhoodan holding*, where the land is allotted to individuals who are governed by the rules prescribed by the Bhoodan Board.

2. *Gramdan land*, where a "community" constituting the Gram Sabha is governed by a set of regulations imposed by the Gram Sabha itself under the guidance or direction of the Bhoodan Board.

3. *Government/Forest fallow land*, occupied by individuals and ratified by the state government, the landholders here are governed by the rules prescribed by the state government through the revenue department.

The approach to organise the farms is partly conditioned by their legal status and the rules and constraints associated with the status. For example, in 'Bhoodan holding', where individuals are the owners of the land allotted to them, it is difficult to organise the farm and relate it with general village development activities. This is more so when the allottees are few and therefore in minority vis-a-vis the village population. The farm, or more correctly, the allottees owning it tend to get isolated from the mainstream of the village life. ASSEFA considers this a "danger" that needs to be avoided. Why ASSEFA considers this a "danger" or what sort of danger it envisages is not clear. It could be that it views such a development inconsistent with its goal, Sarvodaya meaning "development of all" as a community. Or it could be that it sees that if a handful of the oppressed try to move away from the village life and yet remain in the village, the village majority may not like it, may even retaliate and suppress them further.

In the case of 'Gramdan land', where the entire village, the Gram Sabha, is involved, ASSEFA has to undertake a range of activities to reach various sections of the village population.

However, in this category, it has only one project covering two villages (2000 acres, 780 families) in Natham block, Madurai district. Besides land development, the activities started in these villages are health, education, and rural industries.

The emphasis in the third category of farms, 'government/forest fallow land', is on maintaining links with government departments at one and with landholders at the other. In this category also there is only one farm covering 1200 acres and 672 families in two villages of Nilakottai block, Madurai.

Neither of the two can really be called a 'farm'. They are essentially programmes or projects with land development as one of the important activities. As against these two, ASSEFA has 68 farms on Bhoodan land. Clearly this is the most important activity and achievement of ASSEFA.

The first two farms were started in 1969 with assistance from MSP, Italy. In the next eight years, another eight were added, most of them with assistance from MSP. Till this period (1969-77), the attempts were confined to only five districts in Tamil Nadu: Madurai (5 farms), Ramnad (5), Coimbatore (4), and Pudukottai and Tirunelveli (one each). Expansion to other states began in 1978 when sixteen more farms were started—seven in Gaya district of Bihar, one in Kota district, Rajasthan, Seven in Wardha District Maharashtra and one in Madurai district, Tamil Nadu.

From 24 Farms established till 1978, the number jumped to 50 in 1979, when, besides MSP and other donor agencies, the European Economic Community (EEC) stepped in to promote ASSEFA's growth. Sixteen of the 26 new farms were thus started with assistance from EEC: the remaining 10 with assistance from MSP. Assistance from these and other donor agencies helped adding 13 farms in 1982 and 5 in 1983.

The average size of the 68 farms is 71 acres. The number of families settled work out to 28 per farm. However, the size of the farms varies widely—from 9 acres with 9 families (a farm in Madurai district) to 342 acres with 66 families settled, the largest happens to be a farm in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, with 100 families owing 3 acres each. Some idea of the variations in farm size and the number of families per farm can be obtained from Table 3.

Table 3  
Size-wise Distribution of ASSEFA Farms

Size of Holding (acres)	Farm		No. of Families per Farm
	No.	Avg. Size (acres)	
Below 10	1	9.0	9
10-30	12	22.6	12
30-50	15	34.9	15
50-75	13	62.0	27
75-100	16	89.0	36
Over 100	11	163.2	53
Total	68	71.0	28

(Source : ASSEFA records)

What does ASSEFA do to establish and develop the farms ? The planning process, efforts, and achievements vary, understandably, from farm to farm or from one situation to another. But a pattern does seem to have emerged over time. It involves a series of steps or actions, some undertaken sequentially, some simultaneously. A somewhat close classification of these, showing the stages of growth, is given below.

1. *Rapport Building* : From the Bhoodan Board and knowledgeable Sarvodaya workers, the areas/locations where work needs to be or could be started are ascertained. Concern such as desirability and logistics influence the eventual choice. The choice may fall on one or more of the suggested locations. Efforts to build rapport with the Bhoodan allottees in particular and other villagers in the selected locations follow. Many visits are made by ASSEFA workers and several rounds of discussions with the Bhoodan allottees are held to persuade them to start the farm. This takes time. The risk of change, however small or beneficial it may be, is very high for villagers surviving at the subsistence level. The poorer they are higher is the risk and the lower is the risk-taking capability. It is one thing to listen to the well-meant suggestions of well-meaning people, essentially outsiders. It is quite another to accept and act upon them. This risk could be as high and foolish as switching over from subsistence to starvation or worse. The upshot : the intervenors have to provide convincing assurances and back them up by deed to raise the villagers' risk-taking capability to a level required to bring about the change.
2. *Building Infrastructure* : Activities undertaken at this stage include land reclamation, levelling and bunding of lands for irrigation, digging of open wells, deepening and widening of existing wells, installation of pumpsets, formation of channels and underground pipelines, provision for basic services and production aids like farm implements and draft animals. Construction activities like housing, schools and hospitals are normally not undertaken by ASSEFA. This could be due to ASSEFA's concern not to isolate the Bhoodan allottees from other sections of the village population, or because the allottees have houses or huts of their own in the village where the Bhoodan land is donated, or, both.

Another reason could be ASSEFA's wanting to spend on building infrastructure only so much as is necessary to make the land productive, and not any more.

3. *Group Farming and Capability Building* : Depending on the size of the farm and the number of wells dug/deepened, the allottees are divided into groups— usually one group per well. The groups along with ASSEFA workers then prepare the crop plan for the farm and work out ways of implementing it, which involves assignment of roles and tasks to each group and to each member of a group. The tasks include procurement of inputs, cultivation, marketing, and management of group farming functions and activities. The process continues with many ups and downs.
4. *Self-Management and Withdrawal* : Depending on the level and quality of self-management capabilities acquired by the allottees as a collective body, the handing over of the farm to them takes place, enabling ASSEFA to withdraw from the scene. The time it takes to reach this stage is uncertain dependent as it is on a variety of factors, particularly the results achieved in relation to making the farm viable and the dynamics of group working.

A group formed around a specific or a set of economic activities by outside intervenors tends to acquire one of the following attributes depending on the nature and quality of interventions. The observations on group formation process and the chart depicting the process are based largely on author's own involvement in rural development, both as intervenor and researcher, particularly in *The Jawaja Experiment*.

1. The group, particularly if members of the group happen to belong to the disadvantaged section of the rural society, becomes so dependent on the intervenors that the intervenors see virtually no way of withdrawing except at the cost of letting the group and the activity disintegrate.
2. The group and its capability to self-manage progress through several stages of 'group cohesion—confidence in group working—control by some over others—conflict within group leading to factionalism, collusion and crisis'. The crisis may lead to total breakdown or ironically to a new level of cohesion. The cycle may repeat but the chances of

total breakdown keep declining as new levels of cohesion are reached through successive stages of group building. (See Chart).

The intervenors can withdraw with a fair degree of confidence that the group and the activity will continue and generally do so after the group has gone through two or more stages of progression described above. ASSEFA has been able to do this only in respect of four or five of the 68 farms. This handful of farms, which were started 12-15 years ago and have been handed over to the allottees, are reportedly doing well. 'Uchapatti' in Madurai district is one of them. It surely is a 'success story', and it may be worth noting some of its achievements.

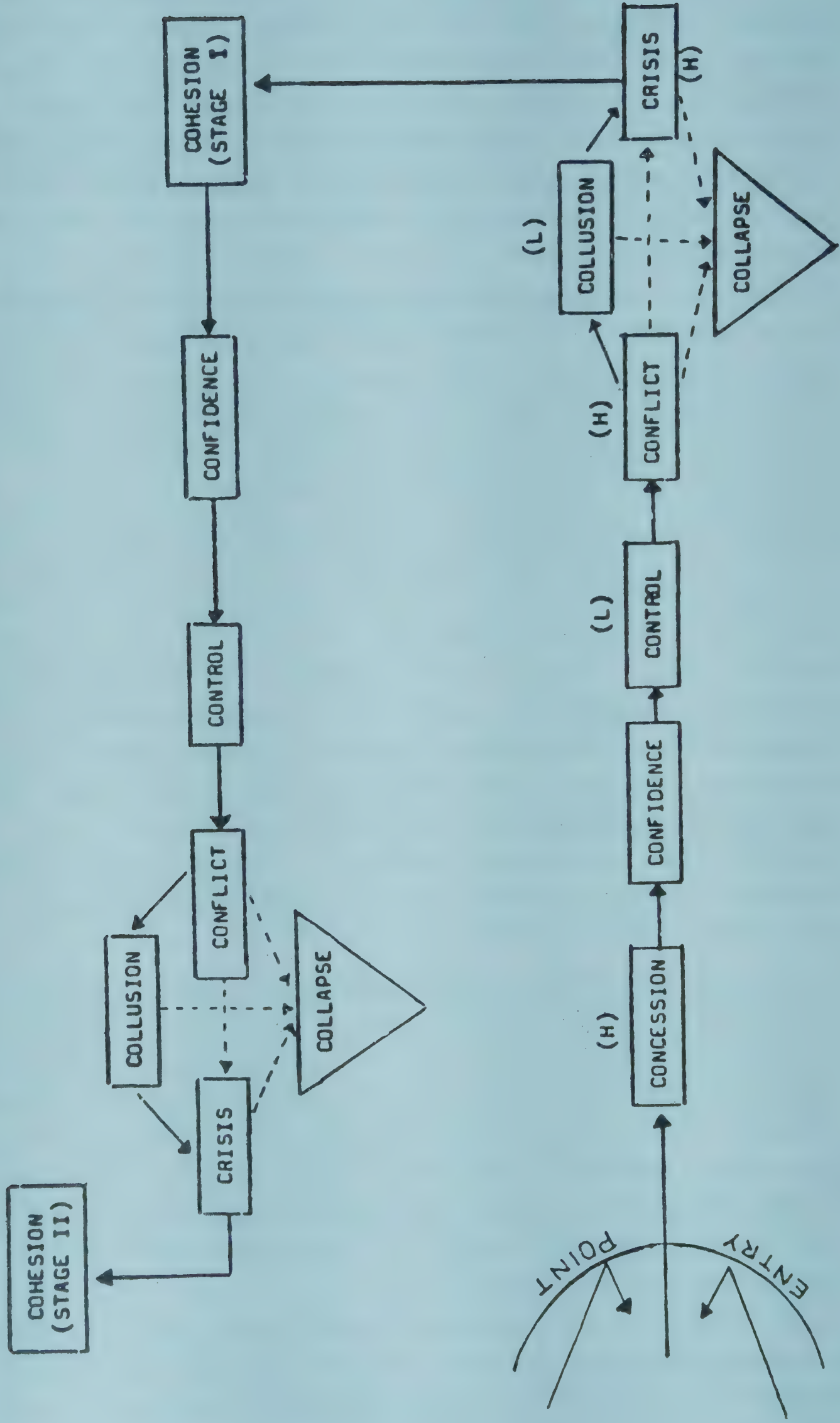
The farm with an area of about 33.5 acres allotted to 13 landless Harijan families (at 2.5 Acres each) was funded by ASSEFA in 1970. ASSEFA handed over the farm to the allottees in 1978 after developing it fully at a total cost (investment) of about Rs. 97,000 or Rs. 2,900 per acre and recovering Rs. 74,600 through income from sale of farm produce and an old oil engine. The allottees, who agreed to repay the unrecovered balance to a local bank from which the amount was obtained as loan, did it within two years. In addition, they invested Rs. 9,400 in farm implements and accessories, and shared among themselves the remaining farm produce worth about Rs. 43,000. Put it differently, within two years they took over the farm they managed and earned a net annual income of Rs. 3,443 per family or Rs. 1,085 per acre at 1980-81 prices. At the time the author visited the farm (June 1984), they had liquidated the entire loan, obtained from the bank fresh loans and refunded to it all but Rs. 6,500 of the loan amount totalling Rs. 27,000; purchased some additional implements and accessories, started a sericulture unit, and seemed determined to further improve their lot.

Besides ASSEFA's steadfast efforts to help the allottees to develop the farm, an important reason for these achievements is *intensive cultivation*. Almost every inch of the farm is cultivated 2-3 times a year. The entire farm is irrigated through five wells fitted with pumpsets. The mix of crops the allottees grow (food crops for home consumption, and vegetables and cash crops primarily for developing the farm and ensuring steady cash flow round the year) and the crop rotation plan they follow are of an order which many agricultural scientists may not be able to match.

Being resourceless to start with and having opted for intensive cultivation there has been an interesting development. The more intensive is the cultivation the more is the need for labour. Instead

PROCESS OF SELF-RELIANCE

(Degree of Reassurance: H = High, L = Low)



of hiring labour from outside, which they felt might be not only expensive but also less productive due to the labourers having little stake in productivity, they invited their relatives and friends from neighbouring villages to join them as partners in production.

Not being Bhoodan allottees the invited persons enjoy a membership status slightly lower than the allottee members. The newcomers having no legal status over the land and working on the farm as informal members constitute almost as large a group as the formal members. Among other reasons this is due to the fact that each formal member has inducted one relative or friend to preserve the balance of power.

The motivation is more income from the farm for themselves, the process is political and democratic.

The informal members participate in all activities of the farm, even in decision-making, but they have no right to vote. It is likely that they also receive a little less than the formal members.

Another feature worth noting is that while intensive cultivation has substantially increased the net income per acre, the income per member (formal + informal) or family, has remained, in real terms, more or less constant in the past 3-4 years. No generalisation is intended. But the case, even though it may be atypical, suggests that the poor, as they succeed in achieving a better status, are socially as well as economically attracted to share the gains with their less fortunate kith and kin. They may cross the poverty threshold and yet remain poor.

More than income, the achievement of Uchapatti is reflected by the confidence the allottees have gained in their ability to manage their farm and to deal with the external agencies, government as well as non-government. When asked what do they think they have gained most by working together and developing the farm, the allottees, who are all Harijans and were either landless or bonded labourers earlier, said:

“We have gained recognition in the village. Other castes, who were our masters earlier, now not only listen but also pay attention to what we say. Members of the forward castes also visit our farm. Some of them even work as wage labourers in peak season.”

One of the allottees with whom the author had a prolonged discussion said that before he joined the farm he was an agricultural labourer. He married the daughter of a bonded labourer in Ucha-

aptti and started living with her. It was his father-in-law who received in 1956 a piece of land on which the farm is built. He inherited the plot from his father-in-law after he died. In the initial years when he joined the farm he, like others, was extremely poor. "While the cash income even now is far too inadequate", he said, "my food habits have changed radically for the better. As the farm now grows pulses and vegetables, besides cereals, all the allottee families now eat well. It is no longer rice and salt once or twice a day. But also pulses, vegetables, oil and tea."

He has recently built a new house. All his children of school-going age go to school. According to him, all of them including himself and other members of the family are better dressed and better fed. One of his worries, he said, was that he was not sure whether any of his sons would like to work in the farm, and even if they did, whether they would work as painstakingly as him to keep it going.

Projects like Uchapatti and some of the other projects of ASSEFA represent, no doubt, the strengths and achievements of ASSEFA. The contributions they have made in this field are surely valuable.

But viewed from another perspective, the scale of the contributions made vis-a-vis the size of the problem and the time and resources spent to achieve these, one sees how little they have been able to achieve. It has taken nearly 15 years to establish the 68 farms covering 4800 acres of the 1.29 million acres of land distributed to the Bhoodan allottees two to three decades ago. No doubt the work is very difficult and hazardous. But 15 years and only 0.4% of the distributed land reclaimed suggest that even if ASSEFA were to raise the coverage from 0.4% to 10%, it will take over 350 years to reach the level. One can of course, assume that the rate of progress will increase with passage of time. But how much? Twice? Thrice? Surely not more. At three times the present rate, it will still take more than 125 years. Add to this the time it takes to make the farms viable and hand them over to the allottees, road seems to stretch to eternity. One can add more constraints, such as the financial, technical and human resources needed to carry out the work. But there is no need to add them.

This does not mean that the fault lies with ASSEFA or with its approach. Nor is it intended to belittle the contributions it has made. ASSEFA should continue with the work they are committed to, and we wish them well. The point being stressed is how much more needs to be done and who can or will do it.

# Report on the Development of Bhoodan Lands

by the Study Group, Planning Commission, \*  
Government of India

Two Study Groups were set up by the Planning Commission "to go into the question of developing Bhoodan land and the ceiling surplus lands. The Study Group for development of Bhoodan lands met on July 29, 1978. The Chairman suggested that this study group could also consider development of ceiling surplus lands and that a separate meeting of the other study group may not be necessary. This was suggested in consideration of the fact that problems of development were common to Bhoodan and ceiling surplus lands and separate exercises would not be worthwhile. Further, apart from a common Chairman, representatives of the Bhoodan Movement, the Planning Commission and the Union Department of Expenditure were represented in both the Groups. The only exception is the representative of the Uttar Pradesh Government, but that ought not to justify separate deliberations by the second Study Group. One State Government, Bihar, is represented already in the first Study Group. Besides several State Government representatives including the representatives of the Uttar Pradesh Government were represented on the Working Group on Land Reforms set up in connection with the sixth Plan. This Working Group had gone into the question of development of ceiling surplus lands. It was, therefore, felt that these facts should be brought to the notice of the Planning Commission who may be requested to reconsider the expediency of continuing with the second Study Group.

2. According to the estimates furnished by the Sarva Seva Farms out of about 42 lakh acres of Bhoodan land donated throughout the country, nearly 13 Lakh acres have been distributed. While

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1. Vide Planning Commission Office Memorandum Q-19012/6/76-A & RD dated the 21st June, 1971 as modified by their Office Memorandum of even number dated the 13/15th July, 1978. The composition of the Study Group on Bhoodan lands is at ANNEXURE—K.
  2. The Planning Commission have since accepted this recommendation and wound up the Study Group on Ceiling-surplus Lands, vide their Office Memorandum No. Q-19012/6/76-A & RD dated the 26th August, 1978.
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\* N. Sivaraman, Member, Planning Commission, Government of India.

some more land may be distributed, it is inevitable that a substantial proportion of the remaining land will remain undistributed because this land is of very poor quality and will not easily lend itself to economic crop husbandry. The Study Group was of the opinion that such land as cannot be developed for productive agricultural purposes should be made over to the State Governments which could utilise it for afforestation, common pastures, etc. The essence of the Bhoodan movement is to affect a transformation in the agrarian structure by redistribution of agricultural land and since the development programme now contemplated will keep them fully occupied for several years. The suggestion of Shri Jagannathan, President, Sarva Seva Farms for making over such land to Grama Panchayats and other village bodies was considered. Shri Jagannathan's view was that since State Governments already have sufficient land, undistributed Bhoodan land should be made over to voluntary agencies. It was felt that this might not be practicable in areas where Gram Sabhas or Gram Panchayats of the type contemplated by the Bhoodan movement were not in existence or, even if in existence, were not functioning satisfactorily. The Study Group suggested that the method of management of this land may be left to State Governments who may, in their discretion, associate suitable voluntary agencies. There ought to be no ambiguity that this land should be made over quickly to State Governments. In order to determine its extent and whereabouts a quick survey should be undertaken by the State Governments concerned.

3. The land to be used for agriculture varies widely in quality and potential for development. While some land may be available in compact blocks and may thus lend itself to planned, long-term development, other Bhoodan land would be comprised in small, scattered parcels. There can thus be no uniform approach. Development efforts for land available to compact blocks should be organised, as far as possible, under one common management by the application of corporately organised services and inputs. The Study Group took note of the fact that the Sarva Seva Farms have identified 2,116 compact blocks of 50 acres or more comprising an area of 1,03,104 acres in 8 states (see Annexure-II) and propose to develop these blocks over the next five years. Some more area can possibly be located and Sri Jagannathan's estimate was that the area comprised in compact blocks could be around 4 lakh acres. The average cost of development has been estimated at Rs. 5,000/- per acre. This estimate includes the cost of organizing subsidiary occupation like

dairy, poultry, etc., for the beneficiary. The Sarva Seva Farms Scheme contemplated that title to the land will be held by the Sarva Seva Farms till the investment is recouped. The prospective allottees will be employed on wages till then and, on the return of the investment from profits, they will be given titles subject to a restriction on the right of transfer except by way of succession.

4. While it is true that this scheme will relate only to a fraction of the area allotted under the Bhoodan Movement—to one lakh out of 13 lakh acres distributed—the Study Group recognized its utility and felt that its success could be a model for taking efforts at developing other Bhoodan, ceiling-surplus or Government waste lands. It is easy to point out conceptual and operational shortcomings in any scheme, but it is far more difficult to undertake implementation. The scheme of the Sarva Seva Farms, therefore, deserves encouragement and support as a step towards increasing the well-being of the rural poor. The suggestions that follow are inspired by the objective of overcoming difficulties that we anticipate would arise.

5. The first task is to locate resources for the programme. The efforts launched so far have been funded by donations and bank loans. It will be difficult to locate donations sufficient to finance development of nearly 1 lakh acres over the next 5 to 7 years. The Study Group felt that while donations should be welcomed, the major source of funds would be commercial banks which have, despite repeated resolves, done very little for agriculture, especially agriculture or small and marginal farmers and the landless. They should welcome this scheme as an opportunity to realise their avowed but hitherto largely unrealised objective. The Sarva Seva Farms, on their part, should consciously accept commercial bank loans as their major source of finance. Their inhibitions, if any, should disappear if the reliefs suggested later in this note are to be available.

6. It is necessary, at this stage, to refer to the Sarva Seva Farms' suggestion that funds for development of Bhoodan lands should, on the analogy of assistance to allottees of ceiling-surplus land, be given as grants and they should not be discriminated against and obliged to take bank loans. The Study Group recommends this for two principal reasons. Firstly the amount given to the allottees of ceiling-surplus land was a small fraction of the amount recommended for development of Bhoodan lands. Secondly the benefit of development and management available for Bhoodan all alone was

not available to allottees of ceiling-surplus land who had to be on their own. It would therefore not be appropriate to equate them.

7. The major inhibition is on account of the high rate of interest (14 to 16% per annum) charged by Commercial Banks. The land proposed to be developed with the loan is very often of poor quality and without adequate water resources, it will be quite sometime before it yields sufficient returns. If the accumulated debt is very high, it can not usually discharge it, inevitably, will be that no investment will be made. Concessional rates of interest are available for certain other purposes some of which do not have comparable social relevance. Since the land is ultimately to be passed on to individuals, the rates of interest applicable to individuals should apply. An interest rate of 4 to 7% should be the ceiling and the Sarva Seva Farms or any other agency recognised by the State Government as an agency entrusted with the development of land meant ultimately for allotment to the landless should be eligible for borrowing at this rate. This may be considered by the department of banking.

8. Some of the compact blocks may be in areas covered by special central schemes like S.F.D.A. or D.P.A.P. Normally, the assistance available under these schemes is extended to individuals but assistance for community works is also permissible. It is recommended that the project authorities may assist institutions of the nature referred to in paragraph 7 above for all the purposes eligible for assistance under these schemes. It is further recommended that utilisation assistance should not be judged on a *percapita* basis. If, for example, a certain amount is given for land development or irrigation, project authorities should examine whether the assistance has been productively utilised and should not object to the expenditure on the ground that the value of the work on the land of each beneficiary falls short of or exceeds the practical limits of assistance to individuals. The rural development department should, besides recognising the eligibility of such institutions, issue clear instructions regarding verification of utilisation of assistance in such cases.

9. Once these institutions receive subsidies from special projects, their borrowings from commercial banks will come down correspondingly. In areas outside the special projects subsidy for minor irrigation schemes would be available under a recent scheme of the Rural Development Department. We would recommend that these institutions may be made eligible for subsidies under this

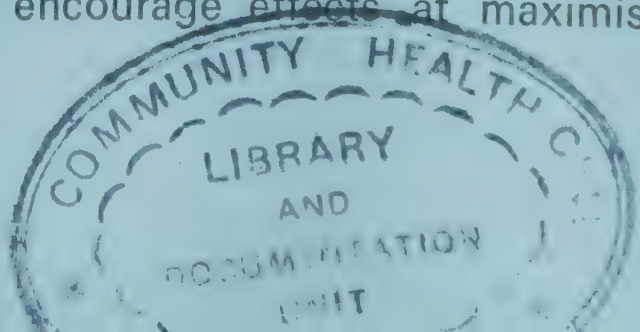
scheme. There is thus a clear prospect of availability of resources and it may not accordingly be necessary for State Governments to supply funds for development of Bhoodan land. This should also hold good for other land if a suitable non-official agency undertakes the programmes.

10. An important question is the title to the land. According to the laws in force in many states governing the donations and distribution of Bhoodan lands, individual allottees are given title to the land which is heritable but not alienable. In the case of inheritance, however, the holding is fragmented since all the successors of the original allottees have equal rights. The Sarva Seva Farm have, therefore, suggested that the law should be amended to prohibit fragmentation even in cases of succession. It is reported that this proposal is being considered in Tamil Nadu. We feel that while fragmentation of land holdings beyond a specified floor level is undesirable, it is not a problem peculiar to Bhoodan land or ceiling surplus land; the problem is common to all agriculture holdings. Unless dependable alternative means of livelihood outside the agricultural sector are available, it will not be practicable to strictly enforce a law banning fragmentation of holdings below a floor level. However, we fully recognise the long-term logic of an anti-fragmentation law. A larger number of States already provide against fragmentation of holdings below a certain size. Implementation of this law may not have been very satisfactory, but such a law clearly discourages fragmentation and states which do not have such a law should enact it at the earliest.

11. The Study Group felt that it would not be practicable to vest title to the entire land in the Sarva Seva Farms or in any other agency undertaking agricultural development programmes in any particular area. For one thing, titles have already been conferred in the bulk of Bhoodan land distributed so far. For another, the experiment of collective farming (which would be the effect of collective ownership and management of land) has not so far succeeded in the country. The experiment may succeed for some time, but a decline in the quality of management or disenchantment on the part of the members will bring about a complete undoing of past achievements. The objective, instead, should be to set up a viable service agency and a change in its favour can be created wherever necessary. Denial of individual titles for all time will not encourage efforts at maximising income from the land.

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12. If individual titles are recognised, it follows that the individual land-holder can mortgage the holding or a part of it to any financing institution. In the event of default in payment of the loan, the mortgaged property may be brought to sale and may pass into the hands of a person with a large holding or with substantial non-agricultural income. The Study Group would suggest that specific provisions may be made in the law or in the agreement with the bank to the effect that in such cases, the cooperative of the beneficiaries should be given the first opportunity to repay the outstanding debt and acquire the land. The land can then be allotted to another landless person.

13. We have earlier referred to the desirability of entitling voluntary agencies to subsidies available under various programmes for the benefit of weaker sections. Some of these organisations have a legal personality only at the State level and the management organisations set up by them in the field do not have any separate legal status. Not having this status, they may not be eligible to the assistance under reference. The Study Group felt that these field level organisations should acquire a separate legal status, either under the Societies Registration Act or under the Co-operative law, which entitle them to the assistance. If the headquarters will find it difficult to disburse assistance, it may not be difficult for the beneficiaries to be organised into a cooperative, management being entrusted to workers nominated by the voluntary agency. In other words, while a linkage between the field organization and the State level organization is desirable, it is necessary that the former has a separate legal status.

14. The Department of Rural Development has already issued orders that Special Projects may enrol allottees of ceiling surplus land as beneficiaries under these projects even if the specified number of beneficiaries have already been enrolled. Such instructions should also cover allottees of Bhoodan lands as well.

15. Funds for the development of ceiling surplus land are provided under a Central Sector Scheme. There is an ancillary scheme for provision of assistance for purchase of inputs. Ceiling surplus land distributed after 1-1-1975 is eligible for assistance under these schemes but the entitlement of States to assistance is worked out on the basis of fifty per cent of this area since it is presumed that the remainder would receive assistance under one of the Special Projects. Again, this area is reduced by half for calculating entitlement for land development assistance on the ground that the entire area of ceiling

surplus land may not need land development measures. Fifty per cent of the land development assistance is given as loan and the reminder as grant.

16. The Working Group on Land Reforms during the Sixth Plan has suggested that the entire assistance should be in the shape of grants. This Study Group endorses this recommendation. It is in entire agreement with the following argument given by the Working Group :

“If a portion of it is treated as loan, the State Government would have either to pass on the assistance to the allottees as grant and absorb the impact of the burden themselves, or to recover half of the land development assistance from the allottees. The latter would be extremely hard on the allottees whose income from the land, even after development, would not leave any cushion for repayment of the loan. It is accordingly suggested that the entire land development assistance should be treated as grant to the allottees. As far as State Governments are concerned, it would be expedient to insist that they take up an additive programme rather than meet the cost of converting the loan to a grant”.

17. The Working Group went a step further and recommended that the entire assistance available under these two schemes (assistance for purchases of inputs, and land development assistance) should be pooled and made available to the State Governments so that they could draw up worthwhile programmes of development. This was recommended in consideration of the fact that the cost of land development is several times larger than the assistance available under this scheme. While this Study Group endorses this recommendation, it would like to point out that mere disbursement of the assistance may in many cases be unproductive. What is necessary is that a suitable organisation for undertaking development should be located and this organization should be given the pooled assistance wherever land development is necessary.

18. The contents of the development programme will vary from area to area. Whatever the contents, the quality of participation by the beneficiaries will be crucial. The Study Group would like to emphasise on the need for programmes to educate the beneficiaries and to suggest that State Governments should provide adequate trained manpower and financial support for organisation of such programmes.

19. Contour and capability surveys of the allotted land should be the starting point. For this as well as other items of development work, voluntary agencies have to be given technical manpower support to the extent necessary. This support may be channelised through Blocks or other agencies of development administration.

20. The Study Group felt that it was important to ensure that the allottees were not evicted from the land. Eviction is facilitated where the names of the allottees are not mutated in the Records of Rights. State Governments should review their laws and administration of these laws so that stronger interests do not succeed in undoing the little benefit that weaker interests have obtained through the land redistribution programme. Summary powers of eviction of trespassers and restoration of land to the allottees should be vested in Revenue Officers.

21. The Study Group has already referred to the desirability of State Governments supporting the work of voluntary agencies undertaking agro-economic development of compact areas. This support has to be particularly intensive in respect of subsidiary occupation. Considering the pressure on land, it is obviously impossible that the landless can be given sufficient land. However high the standard of crop husbandry in these small parcels of land, the income of their owners will continue to be low unless supplemented by income from other occupations. What is more, *per capita* income may actually decline as the population dependent on land increases. Fortunately, these other occupations can provide substantial incremental income, but intensive investment and extension efforts will be necessary. It is suggested that the scope of developing these occupations should be explored along with development of land and necessary supporting measures should be provided by State Government.

22. The foregoing discussions may now be summarised as follows :—

- (i) The undistributed Bhoodan land should be quickly surveyed and those unsuitable for economic crop husbandry should be made over to State Governments.
- (ii) There should be a conscious policy of encouraging development of Bhoodan, ceiling-surplus and government waste lands through *bona fide* voluntary organisations if compact blocks of such land can be located.
- (iii) Development of compact blocks of Bhoodan land could be financed primarily by loans from commercial banks.

- (iv) The rate of interest now charged by commercial banks should be reviewed downwards and should not exceed 4 to 7 per cent per annum.
- (v) The recognised voluntary agencies should be made eligible to assistance and suitable under the various special projects and Schemes and should be treated as community agencies. In such cases, the criterion of disbursing and verifying assistance should be changed and productive utilisation on a *per capita* basis should be the norm.
- (vi) Allottees of Bhoodan land should be enrolled as beneficiaries of special projects even if the Project Authorities have already enrolled the specified number of beneficiaries.
- (vii) Assistance under the Special Projects cannot be given to an organisation which does not have its headquarters in the project area. It is necessary therefore that field level organisations should acquire a legal personality without disrelating themselves from the parent body.
- (viii) The loan assistance now given by the Government of India for development of ceiling-surplus land should be converted to grant. This should be pooled with the land development grant and the grant for purchase of inputs now available so that the scheme of development can be executed.
- (ix) Title to Bhoodan/ceiling-surplus land should vest in individuals. This title may be made inalienable except by succession.
- (x) Hypothecation with a recognised financing institution should be permitted, but in the event the land is brought to sale for default in repayment, the cooperative should have the first right of purchase on payment of the outstanding debt.
- (xi) All states should legislate against fragmentation below a specified floor level.
- (xii) Law and administration must ensure that the allottees are not evicted from their holdings.
- (xiii) State Governments should support programmes of agricultural development and development of subsidiary occupations with funds, extension efforts and supply of know-how.
- (xiv) In addition to the above, programmes for education and training of the allottees should also be supported by State Governments.

## ANNEXURE

List of identified plots of Bhoodan Blocks to be developed in five-years in different States of India.

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>STATE</i>	<i>No. of Blocks</i>	<i>Extent in Acres</i>	<i>No. of manageable Project unit of about 50 ac. each.</i>
1.	Andhra	51	13,082-50	269
2.	Bihar	125	17,622-71	331
3.	Karnataka	14	923-23	19
4.	Kerala	21	2,060-00	41
5.	Madhyapradesh	134	17,953-31	347
6.	Maharashtra	350	7,302-49	152
7.	Orissa	387	16,585-49	332
8.	Rajasthan	107	25,546-73	193
9.	Tamilnadu	30	2,037-95	46
		1,219	1,03,114-51	1,730

# Report on visit to ASSEFA\*

## *February 10-20, 1984*

This report will tend to be enthusiastic as I have watched this program develop since my first contact in 1978. I returned in 1980 and again presently. The progress has been literally phenomenal. To keep my enthusiasm within bounds, at the end of this report I recommend that the CPD for India keep in close contact with the ASSEFA program in the future.

### **Rural Development in India**

The last six five year plans have been orientated towards savings and growth. The savings which mean great sacrifices in the present to assure future prosperity has reached the incredible level of 23%. This type of investment has allowed India, in three decades since 1950, to attain a 300% increase in national income, 250% increase in agricultural production and a 500% increase in industrial production. The recent German and Japanese economic miracles will have to make room for the Indian miracle.

Yet, there is a reverse side to the medal. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening dangerously in this still poor country. The vast investments in the industrial sectors and low investments in the traditional sectors, at best has developed a dual economy, or at worse a disequilibrated and stagnant one. How can an economy continue to develop its industrial capacity when the majority of the population are so poor that they cannot buy the product? How can the increasing landless labourers become "consumers" if they have little or no income? The average landless labourer, if he is lucky to get work, earns about 8 rupees (\$1 Can) per day. The dual economy has increased the number of landless labourers dangerously. In 1961, this category numbered 31.5M, by 1971, the number was 47.5M and it is estimated that the number presently is about 65 million. This is an incredible drag on an economy trying to take-off. The elite tend to blame this problem on the continuing growth is the birth rate. Yet even if the birth rate stabilizes, the growing water, sanitation and health programs will continue to bring child mortality down and the population will continue to grow for a few decades. The stabilization of population is locked within economic policies that reach the poorest. It is at this level where high traditional fertility exists.

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\* Romeo Maione, Director General, NGO Division, Canadian International Development Agency, Canada.

The only policy that will work is to move them out of the traditional cultural mode towards a future with hope. This is the task that ASSEFA has taken on; that ASSEFA reaches the poor cannot be questioned, the travel necessary to reach the villages testifies to the fact. The real question is can they develop at the necessary speed and retain their incredible vitality, dedication and motivation. Without these traits real rural development becomes the imposition of plans from without.

### **Some History**

ASSEFA continues to be inspired by the Gandhi message "all persons are equal, sharing the produce of their labour; the strong protecting the weak. with each promoting the welfare of all". This message has been muffled in the mad race to modernize and industrialize. Gandhi believed that if the means to reach an objective are fair, the ends automatically will also be just. It could be added "when development plans are not fair, then the ends automatically will be unjust".

Vinoba Bhave took up the gauntlet of using fair means to develop the rural villages of India. He launched the "Bhoodan" (land gift) movement and the "Gramdan" movement which means village gift. A village becomes a Gramdan village when 50 per cent of the cultivable land in the village or 66 per cent of the resident land holders donate all their land to the Gram Sabha (village assembly). Vinoba undertook a series of walking tours across the length and breadth of India. It is estimated that in fourteen years, he walked over 60,000 km. Everywhere he asked land owners to transfer land to the landless. In the 14 years, he was able to get the land holders to transfer 4.2 million acres. This land is held in trust by Bhoodan Boards established by the government. The land is then transferred by these Boards to landless labourers (allottees). The difficulties were many. Disputes of land boundaries was followed by the fact that the land was far from the best. The land was invariably unirrigated and required reclamation and levelling. In addition, to start cultivation, the allottees required inputs, such as draught power (bullocks), implements, seeds and fertilizers. The allottees were so poor that they could not even contribute their labour on their own farms, for this meant withdrawing from the labour market and consequently a loss of daily wages. In the absence of savings, not to say debt ridden, the allottees were unable to stay away from the labour market for more than a few days at a time. The Bhoodan land thus remained fallow, the frustration of the landless was total.

In 1969, the ASSEFA movement was born. With the help of an Italian NGO, a tract of 70 acres with 35 families was developed. The allottees were paid the going wage by the Italian NGO and were able to reclaim 70 acres, and dig five wells. By 1982, 8,478 acres of total barren and uncultivated land, most of it poor quality, has been brought into intensive cultivation. The total investment per acre has been estimated at about \$500 per acre.

The landless labourer who has been transformed into an income producing small farmer is expected to return around 50% of the invested capital to ASSEFA.

### **The ASSEFA Work Process**

The essential principle of ASSEFA development is that the project is planned, designed and implemented by the allottees themselves. It is their land and it is their responsibility to cultivate their land. The ASSEFA role is the catalyst in the process. This process not only increases the value of the land and its production but also allows the landless labourer to make decisions and so "be more". Village development is not just material development but maybe even more, the development of the person. The responsibility to increase food production has spin-offs, with an increased sense of responsibility [in other sectors of human existence, including family planning. The process takes time. It is estimated that it takes 7 to 10 years for ASSEFA to make a landless labourer into an independent and income producing farmer.

The first phase is one of initial communications. This starts when a "Sevak" worker trained by ASSEFA goes to live in a village. His task without promising aid is to try and understand the village and start the process of communication among the villagers. This "Sevak", community development worker, is the key that opens the door of building up a human organization. This process may take one to three years. ASSEFA is turning out 20 to 30 "Sevaks" in their two training centres every year. It is estimated that each worker can work with 50 families with 100 acres. This worker works at the primitive level of the villager. He receives about half of the going salary, about Rs. 400 (\$50 Can) per month. He is a formidable human specimen.

The second phase is a type of pilot project to test the possibilities of an income generating project. This is the visible projection of the growing human cooperation. This phase can take two years.

The third phase is the implementation of the development project. The usual step is to get water, depending on the water table, either through hand dug or bored wells. The allottees are paid the usual labourer wage. With irrigated land, the first crop is for family consumption. The second and sometimes third crop are cash crops—ground nuts, sun flowers, grapes, millet, rice, rice seed, etc. In between, various fruit trees such as mangoes, coconuts, etc. are planted. Depending on the size of the land, usually two acres per family, the next step is to initiate animal husbandry, goats, sheep, milk cows, etc. This is financed through local government grants, various subsidies and 4% bank loans, guaranteed by ASSEFA. For the allottee to buy a cross breed Jersey (5 to 6 litres of milk per day) at a cost of Rs. 2,500 (\$300 Can) means a new world. The state will contribute \$100 and the bank loan will be \$200. According to a banker the recovery rate is 90% in relation to the usual 40 to 50% recovery rate. It is interesting to note that during the trip, the World Bank announced the cut-off of the loan program through the Indian government to small farmers because of a very low recovery rate. The local banker insisted that the high recovery was due to the ASSEFA methods of education and organizing their members.

The next step is the development of small agro-industries. About one third of the farmer's time is needed to cultivate his two acres for his family needs. The next third is used for cash crops and animal raising and the last third for small industries. These small industries are marked by very small capital investment, e.g. Rs.2,000 (\$250 Can) for a two man rolling pin manufacturing unit. One man through the use of ropes replaces the electric motor of a wood lathe and the other man uses chisels to shape the rolling pin. They produce 40 per day, sale price Rs 1.50 each. Previously these two persons would have earned Rs. 8 each per day. Now along with their food production, they each earn Rs. 30. The other aspects of these small industries is that the raw material comes from their land. Their industries are value added, the sweet industries use the ground nut cash crop along with peanut oil which comes from crushing the nuts. Other small industries are the tamarind processing unit, oilseed crushing units, handmade paper industry, leather work shop, construction materials, weaving, etc.

Most of these industries are found in the Gramdan projects because of the larger human resources. Many of the families have children aged from 10 to 15 who previously worked in the fields are now working the small industries. These have developed an inter-locking work and school schedule.

The social organization such as women organization, youth groups, health and education start to appear. In one village, the women organized a ceremony style ritual where they deposited their savings of rice for ASSEFA to use to develop other projects.

The final step which is also part of the previous step is management training of the leaders of the groups.

And finally, after 7 to 10 years of associating with ASSEFA, the farmer is on his own except for professional services of ASSEFA when they are needed.

### **Lessons for Development Agencies**

- 1) Rural development is not just economic development. It is this but much more—social, cultural and human development.
- 2) This type of development is based on human dedication and most importantly goes at the pace of human development and not at the pace of government plans.
- 3) Governments work on shorter time horizons—the usual is five year plans—while rural development has a time frame of 10 to 12 years. Governments are sprinters while farmers are long distance runners. In fact, it takes the longest time to get them to want to run the race.
- 4) NGO donors come on the scene after the first and second phase. They start to nibble at the project stage. Like governments they also fear long term programs. Yet it is only in accepting the 'long term' that rural development is possible.
- 5) ASSEFA is attracting many very idealistic professionals from government/corporate service but because both governments and NGO's work in shorter time frames, it is difficult for professionals to accept short term contracts. This is a shame for the average salary for a top rated agriculturalist is Rs.24,000 per year (\$3,000 Can).
- 6) Bank loans work when the farmers are well organized. The decision to seek loans is made as a group and the repayment of the loan is also made through group decisions.
- 7) The basis of rural development is organic, its starter is the farmer. The first step is confidence. The next step is income generation which then leads to services such as health, education, etc. This growth is axed on the decisions of the farmer based on his/her priorities.

- 8) Governments are not component in the first phases of the process, in the latter phases of the process, governments can then be facilitators working with NGO's,

### **Recommendations for ASSEFA**

- 1) Strengthen their relationship with the consortium. The next meeting of this group should be held in Canada.
- 2) A "recovery formula" should be established at the beginning of the project. The recovery rate on bank loans is very good. A formula could be developed that NGO donor funds be loaned at zero interest and repaid over a ten year period. This would allow the newly independent farmer to aid other projects.
- 3) ASSEFA should introduce seminar training for top managers as they move from "face to face" management style to a larger scale type management.
- 4) A formula should be developed to assure a future association of the "independent" farms to ASSEFA. This could be accomplished through a dues structure for each farmer or each farm. These dues could be retained, 60% at the local level, with 20% at state level and 20% going to the national. This could be based on the auto club formula. Another way would be "fee for service" for ASSEFA professional services.

# Progress Report\* : ASSEFA

## I. Introduction

This report is based on a visit to ASSEFA (New Delhi, Madurai, and Madras offices, and projects) in January 1985. The purpose of the visit was to familiarize myself with progress over the past year, to assess ASSEFA's present situation with regard to the core funding support provided by Inter Pares/CIDA, and to discuss future programme and funding plans.

## II. Background

The present project provides "core" support to meet the costs of ASSEFA's administration and training over the 5-year period 1982-87. It will be recalled that the objective of the project was to strengthen ASSEFA by helping it to meet project preparation, training, post-project monitoring, management and other costs, ie. the 3-5 years of "soft" costs which many donors were unwilling to accept as part of a conventional 2-3 years project funding package but which were essential to long-term success.

## III. Overall assessment

ASSEFA remains a dynamic organization; the evidence of this is to be found in the continuing evolution of its methodology as it strives for greater impact while building on the lessons learned over the past 15+ years, and the steady increase of its operational capability. Three examples from the past year's work can be given which reflect this growing maturity: ASSEFA's relationship to the broader "Gandhian movement", its staffing, and a slow evolution in its basic approach.

*Gandhian link* : ASSEFA is proud of its heritage of Gandhian thinking and its approach to community development; all of its programmes are firmly based on sarvodaya principles ("unto the last"). Concretely, this is expressed in a sense of respect for the beneficiaries of its programmes and of humility for its own role of animation and support which is inculcated in all staff from top to bottom. The Gandhian link provides a certain degree of legitimation for ASSEFA in the villages, especially in the initial stages of contact with the villagers, and it enlists the support of state bodies such as the Bhoodan Boards which are responsible for allocating Bhoodan lands, as well as that of many committed Gandhian workers.

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\* Tim Brodhead, Inter Pares, Canada.

*Staffing* : ASSEFA has always been fortunate in attracting committed people for field work, but for a time there was some concern whether the strong Gandhian flavour of the organization might inhibit young technically-qualified people from joining. And yet, as ASSEFA's programme has become more complex and specialized there is a pressing need to combine both commitment and specific technical skills. ASSEFA has demonstrated great flexibility in accomodating both types of background in a productive relationship; the result is that its programmes are soundly—but not bureaucratically—managed, and the sarvodaya philosophy is anchored in a solid capacity to help villagers overcome real problems.

*Approach* : Perhaps the most significant development has been in ASSEFA's method of work. Its early projects all involved the settlement of landless people on Bhoodan land, and over time a fairly standard package emerged to accomplish this (including irrigation and other land development, training in agriculture and self-management, etc.). This accomplished a geat deal through the '70s (2600 people settled on over 6000 acres) but was obviously only a small start on the overwhelming problem of landlessness and rural poverty in India. In an effort to increase its impact ASSEFA broadened its scope in 1981 to include Gramdan villages, starting with Sethur and Sirangattupatti in Madurai District. (The definition of Gramdan is when 50% of the cultivable land or two-thirds of the resident land-owners in a village donate their land to the Gram Sabha, or village assembly, which holds it in trusteeship, 5% of the land to be provided to the landless). Although working in Gramdan villages means that benefits are less exclusively targetted to the landless, it permits the entire village to be developed rather than simply the (often scattered) Bhoodan plots; the requirement that there be a duly constituted village assembly, in which all resident adults are eligible for membership, means that a democratic and participatory forum for discussion and leadership already exists in the village and does not have to be created to ensure self-management. However certain project components, such as education, health and cottage industries can be added and designed to benefit the poorest (in addition to the increased demand for farm labour).

#### **IV. Schools programme**

My visit to some of the projects around Natham coincided with a regular quarterly meeting of ASSEFA's teachers. These meetings are organized to enable teachers to share experiences, to improve their skills, and to plan and evaluate their work. Teachers from the

15 Sarva Seva schools in the district were present (all but two women), with Ms Vasantha, director of the schools programme, and other ASSEFA staff (also the representative of Action Aid, which is funding many of the schools). Ms Vasantha summarized some of the results to date. The ASSEFA educational approach emphasizes the learner's needs, and the relevance of everyday experience. The school is viewed as part of the rural community, it assists the village (a kitchen garden, hygiene and nutrition classes, courses for adults in the evening) and the children are encouraged to do things rather than just learn by rote. The success of the schools has resulted in pressure from villages on ASSEFA to establish more schools, and to expand the existing ones. ASSEFA is reluctant to accept more pupils, especially on transfer from nearby government schools for fear that if too many transfer the government will reduce the already inadequate number of teachers in its own schools (and may even become upset that the Sarva Seva schools are held in higher regard by parents, despite an enrollment fee of Rs. 50). It is noteworthy, too, that pupils in the ASSEFA schools complete the standard eight year curriculum in only five years. Since some of the oldest schools are now five years old, some pupils will be completing their schooling this year. The most capable among them, numbering about thirty, have been selected for special preparation in order to write the Grade 8 exams next year, and Sarva Seva intends to enable them to continue their education afterwards (the government subsidizes schooling for harijans and "backward classes").

An illustration of the quality of ASSEFA's educational programme was provided by an exhibition of items made by the pupils of each of the 15 schools, which included drawings, clay models, painted masks, wall hangings and a variety of practical items. During the day there had been sports events, and shortly after our arrival a cultural programme commenced: first, a puppet show on the theme of the importance of good nutrition for health, followed by a morality play written and acted by 9-12 year olds on the struggle between conscience and behaviour (Conscience argues in turn with a cheating merchant, a drunken wife-beater, and a grasping landowner why they should mend their ways); the entire village gathered in front of the stage, enthralled. Needless to say, this sort of programme, with participation by parents and students, rarely happens in government schools. A further example is the trip organized in March 1984 for 500 pupils to visit Madurai; for five days they stayed with local families, visited the temple, the Gandhi Museum and other sites and

learned about city life (the slums as well as the attractions); at the end they presented four hours of skits and dances for their hosts and city notables summing up their impressions, and apparently, indicating a preference of village life after all.

## **V. Financial Situation**

The five-year core grant provided by CIDA-Inter Pares is now in Year 3 and it is appropriate to ask whether ASSEFA is moving as planned toward fully covering its overhead costs from programme administration % and other sources. It will be recalled that the reason for providing core funding was to help ASSEFA to meet project preparation, training, post-project monitoring, management and other costs, ie. the 3-5 years of "soft" costs which many donor agencies were unwilling to accept as part of a conventional 2-year project funding package but which were essential to any long term success.

To date, the core grant has assisted ASSEFA in the following ways : the relative security has helped to attract and retain highly motivated staff, both at community worker and management levels, it has enabled the organization to "pause" to re-assess and where necessary update its systems and procedures without the over-riding pressure to generate new projects to maintain a healthy cash-flow, and it has positioned ASSEFA for a dramatic expansion of its programming. Simultaneously, it was hoped that ASSEFA's many donor agencies would coordinate their support to a greater degree so as to ensure an uninterrupted flow of funds and a sufficient administration % to cover all reasonable overhead costs. Progress in this regard has been less satisfactory, due to personnel turnover in a number to key agencies and a tendency to continue to prefer strictly bilateral relationships. Three joint donor/ASSEFA meetings were held in 1982, 1983 and 1984, and a useful assessment of ASSEFA's strengths and weaknesses was carried out, however no common funding approach has yet been devised.

Two points should be noted now : first, ASSEFA is still far from being able to meet its administrative costs, and second, the growing scale of its operations is beginning to test the funding capacity of exclusively non-government funding sources (even including those benefitting from government co-funding schemes, as most do).

In 1984, ASSEFA's administrative costs were about Rs. 19 lakhs; the admin % received from projects was about Rs. 6 lakhs. Urgent steps are required to bridge this gap; these include a combi-

nation of a larger programme (assuming that non-project staff are capable of handling a greater administrative load), a much more systematic allocation of strictly project-related administrative expenses to project budgets, realistic overhead charges (currently 11%), and segregating out certain costs such as training and evaluation which are now included in overheads but which many donors are willing to fund separately as projects. Not all of these steps have yet been taken, though local project administration in some states is now being included in project budgets, and the 11% overhead is more reasonable than the much lower rate used previously. One further, and major, step is for ASSEFA to attempt to build up a reserve or trust fund in order to begin to establish a guarantee for its long term security; this is proceeding slowly and deserves encouragement (it stood at Rs. 10 lakh by the end of 1984, and may reach Rs. 26 lakh by the time the core grant expires at the end of 1986). Such a reserve requires a minimum of Rs. 100 lakh to accomplish its purpose.

Though the foregoing is somewhat discouraging in terms of ASSEFA's likely need for continued core support in some form beyond 1986, it should be emphasized that the organization's demonstrated capacity to mobilize resources from the banks and government means that its real impact substantially exceeds what appears on its financial statements. In the meantime new sources of NGO funding must be sought in order to take advantage of ASSEFA's programming capacity now, and to ensure that administrative costs are in line with overall programming expenditures.

## **VI. Future plans**

The evolution of ASSEFA's approach from Bhoodan land development to more integrated village development based on Gramdan has already been mentioned. Although broadening its approach to include Gramdan villages has increased ASSEFA's potential impact it still imposes a heavy burden of staff support and need for external financing; the problem of massive replication on a scale commensurate with the needs has remained. However in 1984 the Tamil Nadu government through the Bhoodan Board approached ASSEFA with a request to become the implementing agency for the development of an entire administrative Block (Natham) in Madurai District, with the cost to be met by local banks and the state government. This, if it proceeds, represents both an enormous expansion of ASSEFA's impact and an unprecedented shift from foreign to local resources. My recommendation is that Inter Pares should provide every support

to ASSEFA to make it possible for it to proceed. This is advisable because i) it builds logically on the foundations of the earlier project at Natham funded by CIDA (INGO); ii) it would be a virtually unique example of local government seeking to replicate on a much larger scale ASSEFA's successes at village level; and iii) it represents a significant shift away from reliance on external funding sources and thus is consistent with the objective of the 5-year core funding grant, which in part was designed to foster greater self-sufficiency.

The proposed new project would cover 175 villages in Natham Block having a total population of some 125,000 people. At the village level the approach is basically the same as that used by ASSEFA in Gramdan villages, ie. the Gramsabha is the basic operational structure, but above it there would be a cluster of Gramsabhas, and a Block-level coordination committee. Banks will provide financing and technical assistance, the Government will furnish extension and programme support (in health, education, etc.), while ASSEFA will be responsible for animation, training, and linking the various project components with the Gramdanees.

The total cost of the project over five years would be approximately Rs. 600 lakhs, of which over half would be provided in the form of bank credit, 15 % from government, 10% as peoples' contribution and the remaining 25% from ASSEFA. Complete details will be furnished separately.



**ANGOC**

## ASIAN NGO COALITION FOR AGRARIAN REFORM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION NOTES

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### ASSOCIATION FOR SARVA SEVA FARMS (ASSEFA) 1986 ANGOC AWARD FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

#### A MARCO VIEW THROUGH MICRO ACTIONS

##### **Ideology and Philosophy :**

ASSEFA is inspired and motivated by the Gandhian Philosophy of *Sarvodaya* - Welfare of all. ASSEFA is the second phase of *Bhoodan-Gramdan* Movement. A movement to emancipate the weaker sections through *Anthyodaya*—upliftment of the last person in society. The spread and networking of ASSEFA in seven states, 23 districts and over thousand villages provide the base for the movement of the people.

The longterm objective of ASSEFA is to establish *Gram Swaraj* - village republics. Characteristically *Gram Swaraj* should promote a society which can establish self-rule, create a non-exploitative system for managing its own affairs and lead itself to self reliance.

This macro vision is built into the mission of ASSEFA in its day-to-day working and due importance is assigned to peoples participation through peoples structures namely *Gram Sabha* (village assembly), Women Forums, Youth Forums and such other structures at the grassroots which are decision-making bodies and are created, sustained and nurtured by the community during the implementation of projects.

The objectives and operations are directed towards this goal. A constant review and monitoring help ASSEFA guide itself to make changes in its approach, methodology and strategy.

### **Approach, Methodology and Strategy**

ASSEFA is the people's instrument for a non-violent, peaceful effort to Human Development. The approach, methodology and strategy are a means to this end and are updated from time to time through the feedback obtained from the community at the grassroots making it a dynamic people's venture and giving it the movement character. The Sarva Seva Farms experiment, started in 1968-69, has undergone tremendous changes.

The multiphase strategy of programme implementation developed over a period of time is a proof in itself. This approach of changing with times without losing the basic tenets of its understanding of development makes the ASSEFA experience very unique. This is also the hope for the poor in the future as the objective in the long run is people's management of community affairs. This dynamism leads ASSEFA and the community, with which it is involved, to a thought process beneficial for making the right kind of changes in the planning process, programme content, tools for implementation, and review of the feedback.

### **Shift Towards Qualitative Change :**

In the initial days, the single programme approach of ASSEFA of developing *Bhoodan* lands and establishing Sarva Seva Farms was largely quantitative. While this quantitative approach continues and are manifested with the integration of other programme areas of livestock development, village industries, community health and education to the basic agriculture development, the shift is towards the social transformation of the society.

The approach is to mix economic development in right proportion with social transformation so as to guarantee lasting benefits and thus development would not become illusory.

A pragmatism is being evolved to seek the equilibrium taking into consideration the technological advancement, managerial demands, skills and capacities of the communities, their need for self-management, to name a few, for ensuring better quality of life.

The age-old customs, values, and social norms are valuable to a society and seldom change without sufficient educative understand-

ing. Many of these customs and social norms are not only dissipating but are anti-development or non-liberating in its process. ASSEFA is attempting to help people to see reason in the need for changing these for a better application without losing the basic values or enjoyment underlying them. This is a major task ahead and a vertical dimension of ASSEFA work which is believed to be more challenging than the horizontal growth in economic development programmes.

## **ASSEFA Coverage**

### **Community :**

The constituency of ASSEFA is the disadvantaged people of society. Initially the primary concern was *Bhoodanees* and *Gramdanees* and gradually with the shift in approach and strategy, the clientele also changed. The whole village approach, cluster development and area approach provide ample scope to develop a mass base for ASSEFA to operate among those who are in need.

Special attention is given to women, children and youth. The various interest groups namely farmers, artisans, landless labourers, cattle rearers etc., together with those who are discriminated by sex, caste, class or age, comprise the whole target beneficiary. The attempt is to take the crowd along as we progress.

### **Geographical Areas :**

ASSEFA started its work in Tamil Nadu and is now spread to seven states namely Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The selection of areas for work is made on the following criteria.

- 1) Availability of *Bhoodan*/*Gramdan* in fulfilling the ASSEFA constitutional mandate.
- 2) Potential for expansion in and around the point of entry.
- 3) Backwardness of the areas for various reasons.
- 4) Possibility of making a mass base for the people.
- 5) Potential for establishing development impact in the long run.

Taking into account the above criteria, ASSEFA has the following areas for its work. These areas are substantially large that cluster (area) approach is feasible and development impact is visible over a period of time. One or more large clusters in each district form the project area.

### **Tamil Nadu State :**

- 1) Madurai District    2) Anna District    3) Coimbatore District
- 4) Periyar District    5) Pudukottai District    6) Chingleput District
- 7) North Arcot District    8) South Arcot District
- 9) Tirunelveli District    10) Kamarajar District    11) Pasumpon District.

### **Bihar State**

- 1) Gaya District    2) Munger District    3) Deoghar District

### **Rajasthan State**

- 1) Banswara District    2) Udaipur District    3) Dungarpur District
- 4) Kota District

### **Maharashtra State**

- 1) Wardha District    2) Yavatmal District

### **Karnataka State**

- 1) Tumkur District

### **Andhra Pradesh State**

- 1) Nalgonda District

### **Madhya Pradesh State**

- 1) Guna District

In the case of the each cluster, within a district, there is further scope for growth. For example, the Kota District with the tribal areas of Udaipur, Banswara, Dungarpur and Kushalgarh, in Rajasthan and similar areas of Guna, Shivpuri and Morena in Madhya Pradesh are potential areas for growth for ASSEFA in north India. There are similar areas in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere. These are backward tribal/*harijan* areas, neglected and have large number of *Bhoodan/ Gramdan* farmers.

### **PROGRAMME AREAS**

#### **1) Agriculture :**

Land reclamation, Irrigation, Crop inputs, Agro Services Centres, Seed banks, Dry farming, Intensive farming, Organic farming, Horticulture, Community Forestry, Social Forestry, Farm forestry, Pasture development, Wasteland development, Plant nurseries etc.

## 2) Live Stock

Dairy, Poultry, Fishery, Goatery, Bee Keeping, Piggery, Draft animals etc.

## 3) Village Industries :

Fibre and yarn based handicrafts, spinning, weaving, pottery, soap making, tile making, pickle making, leather industries, oil extraction, food processing, *pappad* making, coir making, black smithy etc.

## 4) Health :

Community health, health education, nutrition, leprosy work etc.

## 5) Education :

*Balwadies*, Primary Schools, Non-formal education, Adult education, Study tour, Seminars, Exchanges, Convention etc.

## 6 Training :

Training of workers, staff, farmers, artisans in various fields of interest thereby imparting skill and developing entrepreneurial capability.

## 7) Human Development

Through the above physical areas and through the media of *Gram Sabha*, youth forums, women forums, *Gramkosh* (village Trust), *Balkosh* (child education trust), sports groups, cultural groups and using socio-cultural and other media, religious and social functions etc.

Added to the above the concerns about pollution of environment, degradation of natural resources, the scope and potential for regeneration of bio-mass and waste etc., are closely aligned with the clientele ASSEFA is serving. So the linkages between poverty alleviation, development and ultimately quality of life on the one hand and the restoration of the natural resources, its recycling on the other with attendant damaging effects are a challenge to ASSEFA.

ASSEFA's coverage fits in with the operational mechanism at grassroots as well as at the policy levels.

## Phasing Strategy

Every project goes through five phases of implementation which are outlined below:

- initial communication : rapport building, conducting surveys, planning and searching for resources.
- pilot implementation : organizing local groups to demonstrate future action in a restricted area, preparing detailed plans for and securing financial resources.
- Advanced implementation : starting and implementing the various programme in the entire project area.
- Training in self-management : consolidating the programme, building community's own capability to run the activities.
- Spiral Growth : Launching similar programmes in nearby areas where communities are prepared and eager to accept ASSEFA assistance and withdrawal of ASSEFA from earlier projects.

## System :

The systems and operational procedures are organized to meet with expanding demands of performance, goal achievement, monitoring, and review in relation to the growth and diversification of programmes. Similarly budget control, accounting and feedback are evolved in such a way as to effect smooth inter-level and inter-state communication.

The planning, formulation, implementation, feedback, and evaluation are designed to obtain data on performance at a focal point for monitoring. Programme planning through the various phases in consultation with peoples, through planning meeting, survey etc., are formulated into proposals workable with time periods, targets and budget with resources base. Each implementing unit is expected to submit.

- a) An annual budget with targets to be achieved
- b) A quarterly indent with monthly split ups and targets
- c) On implementation of the project, each project is expected to submit the following monthly returns which are monitored centrally and reviewed to check performance.
  - 1) Narrative progress report

- 2) Project incharge action report
- 3) Statement of monthly accounts
- 4) Minutes of staff meetings
- 5) Monthly review of quarterly action plan
- 6) Quarterly action plan and indent
- 7) Monthly statement of recoveries
- 8) Quarterly statement of loans and subsidies
- 9) Quarterly stock return
- 10) State coordinators report
- 11) Travel plans of project incharges, Directors and Coordinators etc.
- 12) Return on physical achievements and targets.

A built in self-evaluation of performance at periodical intervals through monitoring the reports; accounts returns and feedback and on-the-spot check as well as dialogue are found to be useful in directing the projects towards performance and useful learning for policy shaping.

During the annual review meetings which are sharing session in the operational and coordinating groups, systems analysis and goal setting are also done thereby the planning, implementing, reporting, accounting systems are streamlined. The production data, target achievements, recovery rate, people's participation and community organisation etc., are critically analyzed.

The human development aspects and the quality of life are also measured through indicators set for the purpose.

Hence, the operation of the systems enable the ASSEFA to judge its performance objectively and take corrective measures to improve performance and bring forth better results, while involving people who are benefitting from the programme.

The communication within the system is a two-way process. The people communicating to the head office through community workers, project officers, state project coordinators. The head office responds to the people's aspirations through the same channel in return.

### **The Backup Structure :**

The guidance and operational structure of an organisation should promote its goals with one mind and good preparedness. This is a

blessing for ASSEFA. The committed cadre from botttom to top, their skills and development, their disposition to people's demand are assets by themselves. The large number of professionals, technologists and managers, on the one hand, with a band of *Sarvodaya* workers on the other provide full participation as far as the personnel support system of ASSEFA is concerned. The integration between the two categories of staff has been harmonious and is a good blend. The attempt to select and train leadership with adequate skills is taken up as long term goal. The training and consolidation of the people fosters self-rule, self-reliance and non-exploitation. ASSEFA's resolve is to achieve this by the people.

## A SARVODAYA PROJECT

THE ASSOCIATION FOR SARVA SEVA FARMS (ASSEFA)

RECIPIENT OF THE 1986 ANGOC AWARD FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

ASSEFA, 38, K.B. Dasan Road, Teynampet, Madras 600 018, India.

ANGOC, 47 Matrinco Building, 2178 Pasong Tamo Street, Makoti, Metro Manila, Philippines.

*ANGOC - the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development- awarded its 1986 Award to the Association for Sarva Seva Farms.*

*The Award, established in 1985, is meant to recognize the work of grass-roots organisations, preferably a people's association, in order to generate public awareness and understanding of the work of the recipient.*

*The ANGOC Executive Committee, responsible for selecting the Awardee, believes that the work of ASSEFA must be brought to the attention of policy makers, decision-makers, field workers and those involved in development education.*

*It is its hope that the example of ASSEFA will be remembered, appreciated and, if appropriate, adapted to suit local conditions.*

*As part of the Award, ANGOC has published a monograph on ASSEFA, which is largely excerpted below.*

### What is ASSEFA?

The Association of Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA) is an all India base network of small grassroot voluntary organisations working within the framework of Sarvodaya (welfare of all) movement. As a movement aiming for development, the group takes its roots to the second phase of the non-violent Bhoodan-Gramdan movement of Vinoba Bhave.

Although the foremost objective of ASSEFA is to create a Sarvodaya society, its immediate goals are as follows:

to undertake reclamation and cultivation work of Bhooda, Gramdan, Ceiling Surplus land and other fallow lands for the rehabilitation and exclusive benefit of the backward, the poor and the downtrodden people in the rural areas of India;

to provide the necessary implements for these projects;

to undertake the reclamation and cultivation of the above said Bhoodan and Gramdan and other fallow lands in such a way as to recover the agricultural capital made available by the society in each specific project

and reinvesting it in financing further reclamation work on fallow lands;

- . to start and carry on small agro-industries for the exclusive benefit of the rural poor;
- . to train the rural poor agriculturists in sound techniques of careful and effective management;
- . to provide employment to the beneficiaries of the Sarva Seva Farm projects, encouraging them to work on a joint and cooperative basis, including collective responsibility and reciprocal assistance;
- . to encourage independent thinking among the project's beneficiaries by exchange of knowledge, experiences and free discussion on relevant and up-to-date questions, in order to give them fair and broad information, banning party propaganda and dogmatic assertions;
- . to impart literacy, citizenship training and inculcate the concept of right and reciprocal duties and community living; and
- . to undertake community health programmes as part of Sarva Seva Farms projects, or independently, to promote the total health of the community.

The programme content includes, inter alia, promotive, preventive and curative aspects of health care including sanitation, hygiene, nutrition, health, education, medical aid, etc.

To achieve the above objectives, ASSEFA has engaged in various developmental works directly or via other organisations, raised funds within and outside India, worked closely with other agencies and carried out effectively the objectives of the Association on a non-profit basis. Moreover, the organisation is actively involved in numerous projects, most of them in Tamil Nadu. Their major emphasis was given to agricultural production and cottage industries.

However, the main aim of ASSEFA is not only confined to reclamation and cultivation of donated land and provision of farm implements but also to impart literacy and provide jobs in small industries to the farm womenfolk to augment family income.

### The Bhoodan Movement

The Bhoodan (land gift) movement was one of the greatest socio-political movements of independent India. Acharya Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982), one of Gandhi's foremost disciples, launched the Bhoodan movement as a non-violent alternative solution to the problem of inequity in land ownership. The first Bhoodan was made on 18 April 1951 at Pochampalli village near Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh, when a local

landlord, Ramchandra Reddy, donated 100 acres of land to be redistributed to the landless in the village - the first gift of land received. The Harijans had requested only 80 acres for 40 families and Vinoba was thinking of approaching the government authorities in order to have the land allotted to them. Since then, Vinoba marched from village to village carrying his moral revolution to the people. Covering a distance of 800 miles in two months, he had received 12,000 acres of land. Gradually, he began to apply Sarvodaya ideals to Bhoodan, envisioning Bhoodan as an all comprehensive movement directed to reform all walks of life and insisted that in Bhoodan, "distribution of land is not the only question, it aims at the moral reparation of the whole nation".

For 14 years, he tracked the dusty roads of India on foot, asking landlords to donate a piece of land for the poor of India. His dream was to collect 50 million acres of land and he was able to collect 4 million acres. His goal was to achieve Gram Swarai (independence and selfsufficiency) for Indian villages.

The Bhoodan movement is essentially an extension of the Gandhian concept of Trusteeship. The movement restored the focus on land distribution, when the state government of India was smug after having introduced tenancy bills but completely neglected their proper implementation. The effort in Bhoodan was to enlist voluntary donations of land and raise the problems of the landless in the village itself. It sought to meet the needs of the situation, not merely by appealing to the Government to offer their waste land for resettlement, but by appealing to the richer landlords and the village community to donate a portion of their land. Not only Vinoba, the movement's charismatic leader, but hundreds of workers, walked around India's villages and talked to people and listened to their woes. At the end of the first phase, it was a national movement throbbing with activity.

With this beginning, Vinoba undertook a series of Padayatras (walking tours) across the length and breadth of India. He walked for over 60,000 kilometers in 14 years. The total amount of land donated reached 4.2 million acres.

#### The Gramdan Movement

In 1952, Vinoba added the Gramdan (village gift) concept to his movement. The movement was an extension of Bhoodan to the entire village community. Gramdan is an expression of the concept of trusteeship of landed property. While on his Pad Yatra in North India, he requested that a village should become a Gramdan village. Consequently, the village land was to be owned collectively, not individually. The title deeds were to be transferred to the Gramsabha (village assembly), composed of village adults. The Assembly could give one twentieth of the land for redistribution. They were encou-

raged to contribute one day's income per month to a Gram Kcsh (village chest).

A village is declared a Gramdan village when 50 percent of the cultivable land in the village of 66 percent of the resident land-holders donate all their land to the Gram Sabha. The landowners in Gramdan villages retain full rights of inheritance but have no powers to alienate the land in any manner, without prior approval of the village assembly. Once a village is declared Gramdan, it is expected to abide by the following rules:

- . individual owners should be willing to transfer their ownership to the Gram Sabha and should allow a minimum of 5 percent of their land to be distributed among the landless in the village;
- . there should be a duly constituted Gram Sabha and all adults residing in the village should be eligible for membership;
- . the members of the village should contribute a portion of their income as Gram Kosh (common fund), say one fortieth of their agricultural produce for the welfare of the community, with first priority to the weaker sections of the community; and
- . disputes should not be taken to the police or to the courts, but settled in the village itself by a special committee set up for the purpose.

### Sarvodaya

Sarvodaya, generally translated as "welfare of all" was a philosophy made popular by Mahatma Gandhi. It was Gandhi's quest to lay the foundation of Sarvodaya Samaj (a society for the welfare of all). Vinoba joined hands with him in this quest. With Vinoba, Sarvodaya philosophy and practice moved beyond innovations made by Gandhi.

Throughout his life, via talks and speeches, Vinoba expounded on the meaning of Sarvodaya which was not merely a philosophical concept but also a religious ideal to unit all mankind, extending the meaning of Sarvodaya from its narrow bounds to a universal scope.

One of the important goals of Sarvodaya is to radically change the existing political system. It seeks for the good of the majority, not only for the greatest good of the greatest number, but the greatest good of all people.

In the economic sphere, Sarvodaya believes that everything in the world is owned by the community. Consequently, there is no room for individual property or private ownership.

A critical feature of the Sarvodaya economy is the concept of Dan (gift). The people are to be trained in sacrificing

their possessions for the sake of others. According to the precept of Dan, all individuals are capable of giving something for the welfare of their fellow humans. Thus, one can give Sampathi-dan (gift of property); Shram-dan (gift of labour); Gupta-dan (secret gift); Bhoodan (gift of land) or even Jivan-dan (gift of life). One can certainly imagine other kinds of dans, but the important thing is that Sarvodaya believes in the spirit of renunciation.

ASSEFA's guiding philosophy is Sarvodaya, a message which is sought to be spread through an action programme for the development of Bhoodan and Gramdan communities. The sarvodaya philosophy is based on the essence of sharing approach as expounded by Gandhi. ASSEFA continues to be inspired by the Gandhi message : "all persons are equal, sharing the produce of their labour, the strong protecting the weak with each promoting the welfare of all". The Gandhian way to end oppression is to appeal to the conscience and reason of the oppressor by self-suffering and striving for nobility of character in order to convert the oppressor as a willing ally of the new social order, i.e. Sarvodaya.

#### Origin of Sarva Seva Farms - The Birth of ASSEFA

After the Bhoodan lands were received and some distributed to the landless, it was found that in most cases, the Bhoodan beneficiaries could not benefit from the given land. Common reasons for these were : the land was not irrigated and usually required some reclamation and levelling. Moreover, to start cultivation required inputs such as bullocks, implements, seeds and fertilizers. The beneficiaries were landless or owners of very small holdings before receiving the Bhoodan land. They were too weak and poor even to contribute their labour to their own farms. Thus, Bhoodan lands remained unproductive. By the late fifties, attempts were made by Sarvodaya organisations to provide inputs to Bhoodan beneficiaries so they could undertake cultivation. In some places, Bhoodan cooperatives were formed and loans were obtained from the Government for reclamation and irrigation purposes. Other Sarvodaya groups asked some donor agencies to fund specific projects. However, these efforts, which continued into the sixties, were unsuccessful. Among the reasons were the lack of expertise and technical support and inadequate finance. The Sarvodaya groups were heavily dependent on the implementing agency's presence and crumbled as soon as they were left to stand alone. This showed the importance not only of bringing resources physically, but also improving the skills, confidence, cohesion and self-managing abilities of the Bhoodan farmers.

The Sarva Seva Farms started in 1968-1969 in Tamil Nadu. It was a cooperative venture to develop the Bhoodan land under Sarvodaya ideals.

The operative agency was the Tamil Nadu Sarvodaya Mandal and the legal administrative support was given by the Tamil Nadu Bhoodan Board. Giovanni Ermiglia, a retired professor of philosophy from Italy, who is devoted to Gandhian ideas, served as the group catalyzer, with him were Shri S. Jagannathan, a Senior Sarvodaya leader who worked with the landless in Tamil Nadu and Shri S. Lognathan, an activist involved in development work. By 1969, with financial assistance from Movimento Sviluppo e Pace (MSP), Giovanni's Italian parent organisation, the first Sarva Seva Farm project was started at Sevalur and Pudukottai in the Ramnan district of Tamil Nadu.

The primary goal of the organisation was to distribute land obtained under Bhoodan among the poor and the Harijans.

Well digging, land reclamation, education and recreation through a variety of local cultural artifacts were the first major activities of the Sarva Seva Farms. With group cooperation, the land was soon reclaimed, levelled and cleared of rocks and scrub. A whole tract of 70 acres were made productive, and as a result of the digging of seven wells, 35 families benefitted from Bhoodan.

The success of the first project was soon replicated in other areas. By 1976, 10 Sarva Seva Farms were in operation, funds for all of them came from MSP. In 1977, the European Economic Community (EEC) entered into partnership with MSP and other donor agencies to support the movement. By 1978, there were 16 Sarva Seva Farms operating in 5 districts of Tamil Nadu covering 79 000 acres (31,000 ha), benefitting 364 Bhoodan families. By 1980, it was extended to 55 farms, 412 000 acres (165,000 ha) and 1,840 family beneficiaries. And from Tamil Nadu, their area coverage extended to Bihar, Maharashtra and Rajasthan. By 1983, similar programmes were undertaken in Karnataka, Andhra, Madhya and Uttar Pradesh. A goal was set to reach every state of India where Bhoodan lands need development.

ASSEFA was born because of the need for an umbrella organisation to spread the approach to other states. For about a decade, Sarva Seva Farms have worked under the umbrella of Sarva Seva Sangh, a national body responsible for carrying out the work of Sarvodaya. In 1978, it achieved its own legal status and was registered as the Association of Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA). It was formed in keeping with the spirit of decentralisation and yet retained a sense of direction in what was a growing movement. ASSEFA's head office is located in Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

#### ASSEFA Programme

The actual field work of ASSEFA begins by allotting the Bhoodan land to families either belonging to tribal groups,

poor farmers and Harijans. The Association also advances them money and agricultural implements to develop a Bhoodan land to be paid back during the harvest season. In some instances, government and cooperative banks extend loans to the farmers. Usually, Gram Sabhas are organised in each Sarva Seva Farm and in the Gramdan villages, a pre-condition for starting a project in any location.

An important aspect of ASSEFA's work is that projects are planned, designed and implemented by the beneficiaries themselves and ASSEFA merely serves as a catalyst. Since ASSEFA's inception, there has been diversification from isolated development of a few Bhoodan families to integrated development of the entire community in Gramdan villages; from purely land development for cultivation to integration of other programmes such as forestry, animal husbandry and rural industries to supplement the Bhoodan families' income; from purely production-oriented activities to welfare services including health, education and housing.

ASSEFA activities now spread to five states and projects are being envisioned in three more. The total area under Sarva Seva Farm projects as of mid-1983 was 8,000 acres. ASSEFA is working with communities in 70 different locations, benefitting 3,293 families, but principally in Tamil Nadu (38), Bihar (15) and Maharashtra (15). After a decade of operating Sarva Seva Farms, ASSEFA's work was not limited to agricultural productivity, a considerable diversification of ASSEFA programmes has been seen. Since 1980, ASSEFA has included animal husbandry, forestry and rural industries into its programme. Various welfare services such as health, nutrition, education and housing have also been started.

#### ASSEFA's Stand on Development

The experience of numerous development programmes and agencies in India and the rest of the Third World has brought out one overwhelming point : development has to be viewed in human terms and not in terms of achieving physical targets or delivery of specific services. In order to be meaningful, any development must enhance the skills, awareness, self-confidence and self-management ability of the people it aims to reach. In the absence of such emphasis, the "development" effort will either not take off at all, or crumble as soon as the outside agency withdraws.

ASSEFA has the benefit of being the child of one of India's greatest socio-political movements - Bhoodan. It has the benefit of having a network of established allies all over the country who have spent the better parts of their lives spreading the message of Sarvodaya. Finally, ASSEFA has the benefit of having a methodical approach - it has been able to blend the message and the movement of Sarvodaya with a specific, well-tried, innovative method. Underlying each of

there is a deep understanding at all levels of ASSEFA that they are working for fellow human beings who have as much of a moral right to share the bounty of the Good Earth as the rich. From this concern for human development follows a constant effort on the part of ASSEFA to involve the people at all stages - planning, formulation, implementation and evaluation. The major instruments for people's participation are group meetings. Bhoodan farmers are grouped together, usually around a common water source, and the day-to-day decisions for the farms are made by these groups. In many Sarva Seva Farms, allottees undertake community farming and share the produce. In other farms they cultivate on an individual basis, but share the productive resources such as tubewells and diesel pumpsets. The mutual inter-dependence and community spirit which is thus generated is the first step towards group action.

Gram Sabhas are organised in each Sarva Seva Farm and in the Gramdan villages. This is, in fact, the first act and almost a pre-condition for starting a project in any location. All major decisions, which go beyond the realm of a common water source group, are taken by the Gram Sabha. In many locations, these Gram Sabhas have taken action against erring members of the community to enforce justice in sharing of common resources; while others have taken action to force public systems to perform and deliver services that they are supposed to.

Some of the ways in which the ASSEFA tries to operationalise its concept of human development are as follows :

Social encounter programmes: In 1982 ASSEFA started a social encounter programme between different projects. This programme is under the supervision of itinerant social workers who go to stay at a project for two days. Bhoodan farmers from other projects are invited in small groups. On the first day they share a common prayer, song, work and food and begin discussing a theme, which is discussed in all the other farms as well. Everyone is invited to give his opinion and no one's view is derided. On the second day, after getting to know one another, the people attempt to reach a common understanding of the theme and its applicability to the farm itself. The theme itself is vital to the running of the community. The first theme chosen was "group farming - advantages and disadvantages". Other themes discussed included the agricultural production of different crops, as well as health.

Field visits and tours by Bhoodan farmers: Where a new mode of development or the use of a new technique has been adopted, visits to see the development in action are encouraged. Visits are made by both the ASSEFA staff and the farmers to see, for example, new agricultural fodder cropping or build-

ing techniques. The farmers and staff are then able to discuss the practicalities of adopting such techniques before launching a programme.

Organisation of Festivals: When there is an appropriate opportunity, the Bhoodan farmers organize festivals and invite the villagers from around to attend the dancing, singing, drama, sports and feasting. It is common for the communities themselves to do this and the Gram Sabha or Bhoodan Society allots responsibility for the organisation and fund-raising for the festivals to persons within the community. The food for the festival is usually collected in kind from each household and mixed in a common cooking pot. Thus, a community spirit is fostered, which gives a common perspective to the future problems which the farms have to face.

Training: Especially where people have a special learning or traditional talent, ASSEFA backs them so that they are trained to adapt those skills to the use of more modern machinery where necessary, and helps them to manage their production and marketing problems. Examples are in occupations such as blacksmithery, weaving, leatherwork, sericulture, lime kiln operation, etc. Training is also received in certain agricultural developments, e.g. poultry breeding and pig-rearing on a small scale. Training of the Bhoodan farmers as balwadi teachers or health workers for social development is encouraged.

Women are the subject of a special campaign for development and conscientisation. They have many responsibilities in the family and do contribute most of the agricultural labour in the fields. Hence, they have little time or energy left for taking part in discussions or decision-making at community level. Also, they are discouraged from doing so by the men. However, by organising the women into groups, ASSEFA is trying to encourage the women to view their problems in a wider perspective as well as to give them some economic independence through chit fund (savings) schemes and some small economic schemes such as sewing, heifer/goat rearing, poultry breeding, etc. The women's meetings are fora for discussing the problems of women and creating a wider social awareness.

Youth Groups have been taken up for special attention in various projects. The youth are ready to absorb new ideas and to take on responsibility. When they are engaged in practical action, e.g. road formation or tree planting activities and when they see the results of such work, they are convinced of the practicality of working together for the common good. Adult education classes started by the youth groups also help to strengthen the group.

Communication: is all important in this process. ASSEFA is trying to spread the message of cooperation and sharing for

growth by many means. Three farms have had complete radio programmes on All India Radio, devoted solely to them. Two monthly newsletters operate in Tamil and Hindi, in which news of developments in the projects as well as the opinions and technical advice of experts on subjects vital to the farms are disseminated.

## THE FUTURE

Having shown that it has the capability and the commitment to work in a diversity of conditions, ASSEFA is now ready for even bigger strides. Its sights are set on developing all Bhoodan lands which are in continuous blocks of 50 acres or more. As many as 1219 such blocks have been identified, covering 100,000 acres (41,000 ha), in eight states, principally Orissa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar.

ASSEFA does not think of the future merely in terms of additional acreage to be brought under development programmes. Its programmes are becoming multi-dimensional. In addition to agriculture, programmes in animal husbandry, forestry and rural industries are being taken up. Welfare services in the fields of health, housing, nutrition and education are being integrated into the newer programmes.



